

II LENT 2015

SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH

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ST. MATT. 15.21

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Puppy Dog Face...whimsical, light-hearted, facial expression humans make...for begging...attempts to persuade someone...the sad eyes look dog owners know well that says..."Aw, come on!"..."Please?"..."But why not?"...to that scrap of food.

Dogs are mentioned about 40 times in the Bible...they are not the domesticated hyper-friendly Airedales of the Altberg household and sometime visitor to the Parish...but rather undomesticated roving wild dogs...the wary, snarling and unfriendly kind.

In India and certain parts of the Middle East today, feral dogs that hang around garbage dumps and roam the streets looking for food are called *pariah dogs*. When we apply the term *pariah* to a person, we are saying that person is someone we don't want to be around...who is unwelcome in our group of friends...who is a social outcast...we are saying we are better than they are.

The Canaanite woman in the Gospel is a social outcast. The Canaanites were the original inhabitants of the Promised Land. They may have been descendants of Canaan, one of Noah's grandsons. In about 1400 BC, after the Exodus, the ancient Israelites conquered Canaan. Jews and Canaanites did not get along. Jews considered Canaanites to be pariahs; Canaanites hated Jews for taking their land.

Parents don't like to see their children sick...the Canaanite mother is no exception. The Gospel tells us her daughter "has a demon and is in a terrible condition." We don't know for certain what the girl's condition was...but it caused the mother to seek help quickly...from Jesus. She knew what Jews thought about her...that did not stop her from asking Jesus for help.

However, Jesus' responds initially to her cries for help with silence. She was making enough of a scene the disciples asked Jesus to send her away...they showed no compassion for her or her daughter...only annoyance at the noise she was making. Jesus then says it is not right for him to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs. That was an insult...or so it would seem.

Jesus never says or does anything for its own sake. His silence wasn't intended to make the mother feel worse than she already did about her daughter's sickness...or get her to be quiet and run off like a hurt dog...tail between the legs. It was intended to get her to make a Faith response...and she did...she became more determined than ever to get his help...even being called a dog wasn't going to stop her from getting the help she needed.

The mother's response was to throw the insult right back at Jesus...even dogs get the leftovers. The food Jesus is talking about is himself...there is plenty of Jesus to go around...the Canaanite mother saw in him the answer to her prayer...her daughter's restoration to full health...wholeness.

What Jesus wanted was for the mother to say out loud what he saw in her heart. By calling him "David's Son", she acknowledged who he was and admitted she was not one of the children. Her Faith in Jesus compelled her to take action...history and the animosity between Jews and Canaanites was not a deterrent...she wanted Jesus to help her...and she knew he could.

Jesus told the mother she had great Faith and her daughter was well again...at that very moment. Jesus wants us to show the same kind of Faith the mother showed. Faith...is more than just a vague awareness something we believe is true. For our Faith to be real...it has to be acted upon.

When we put our Faith into Action we show our trust and willingness to let God into our lives and help us sort things out...we let him help restore order to our often busy and chaotic lives...and we acknowledge we too have a role to play in living our lives as God intended.

Like the mother in the Gospel...we must be persistent when we pray and ask God for help. Prayer is not a magic act...an attempt to buy God's favor...it is our confident Faith response to Jesus' invitation to come to him with our burdens so he can help relieve them. And we must never forget to say, "Thank you."

We always have God's undivided attention and he is always willing to give us the help we need...the food he offers is better than table scraps...it is Jesus himself. Let's not wait to take our place at the table.

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