

Goal: That the hearers would rejoice in the universal grace that Jesus gives us.

She just wouldn't take no for an answer, this pesky Canaanite woman. No matter what Jesus said to her, she just kept coming back like a bulldog, with a faith that wouldn't let go no matter what. Even more amazing, this was an outsider to Israel! That's what this Gospel is all, God's universal grace to all in Jesus and the faith of a bulldog that won't let go no matter what.

Jesus was taking some time off on the north coast, the region of Tyre and Sidon. *“Jesus went away from there and withdrew to the district of Tyre and Sidon. And behold, a Canaanite woman from that region came out and was crying, “Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon.”*

(Matthew 15: 21 – 22) Gentile country. A woman from the region approached Him. There's two strikes already. A woman didn't approach a man in public and a Canaanite wouldn't dare approach a Jew. Think of Palestinians and Jews today and multiply it. But her little girl is demon-possessed and suffering. Jesus is her last and only hope.

“Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David.” She tries to pass herself off as an Israelite. “Son of David” is the Israelite term for the Messiah. Maybe Jesus wouldn't notice her accent or her facial features. Maybe she could trick Him into a blessing. But Jesus says nothing. He won't be tricked. He's no vending machine into whom you put your nickels and dimes of righteous phrases and out pops your blessing on demand.

The disciples think they have Jesus all figured out and jump on the bandwagon. *“And his disciples came and begged him, saying, “Send her away, for she is crying out after us.” (Matthew 15: 23) “She's a pain; she's following us everywhere; tell her to her to get outa here.”* Sound familiar? It's the voice of exclusion, discrimination, and suspicion toward the outsider, the stranger, the unwashed, and the unbelieving. It had been drilled into the disciples' heads from childhood. Canaanites were the descendants of Canaan, the cursed grandson of Noah. *“Don't go near those people. Don't talk with them, eat with them, or touch them. And don't you ever think of marrying one of them!”*

But Jesus ignores the disciples and He sees through the woman's cunning words. There's no pulling the wool over the Good Shepherd's eyes. He knows what makes you tick better than you do. *“I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”* *(Matthew 15: 24)* He reminds her of who she is, a filthy Canaanite, not one of the chosen.

How dare she even talk to Him? ***“But she came and knelt before him, saying, “Lord, help me.” (Matthew 15: 25)*** She just wouldn't take no for an answer, but there's no more “*Son of David*” smooth talking. Just the prayer of a desperate beggar, “Lord, help me.”

“And he answered, “It is not right to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs.” (Matthew 15: 26) Is this the Jesus we know and love? The Jesus who says “*Come to me with your burdens?*” He calls her a dog, a little house dog, but still a dog. Dogs are considered dirty in the Middle East, even still today. Not pampered pets as we see them; but as garbage eating scavengers. Dog is what Israelites called Canaanites. It was an ethnic slur. *“You Canaanite dog, how dare you beg for the children's bread.”*

Still she refuses to go away. And she doesn't stop praying. In fact, she agrees with Jesus. (***“She said, “Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.” (Matthew 15: 27)*** *“Yes, Lord. You’re right. Dogs don't deserve the bread of the table, but they do get to lick up the crumbs that fall from their master's table.”* She's got Him, and she's not about to let Him go.

That's faith talk from a Canaanite! An outsider. And it isn't some puppy dog faith. This is a bulldog faith that locks its jaws on Jesus' words and won't let Him go. Crumbs from her master's table are a feast for her, and she won't be denied. She may be a dirty Canaanite dog, but she clings in hope to Jesus trusting that He's bigger than Israel and that His mercy is wide enough to embrace even the likes of her.

Jesus answered her, “O woman, great is your faith! (Be it done for you as you desire.” And her daughter was healed instantly.” (Matthew 15: 28) He commends her faith. Faith that doggedly clings to Jesus even when He appears to reject her. Faith that won't let go of Jesus. ***“Be it done for you as you desire.” And her daughter was healed instantly.”*** Just a word from Jesus and the devils flee.

It's a nice story. It doesn't start out that way, but it has a happy ending. A little girl is healed; a woman of faith is praised. But it probably left the disciples wondering, “*What is Jesus up to? He even has compassion on Canaanites?*” They probably spent some time wondering how an outsider to Israel can have greater faith than the insiders.

But we've been there too, haven't we? We've walked in the disciples' sandals. We've judged the outsider, excluded those who made us uncomfortable. We say that Jesus is the Savior of the world, but we act as though He were the Savior of those who

are just like us. We're pretty good with the exclusive side of Jesus, but a little slow on the inclusive part. The doctrines of our church proclaim the Gospel of universal grace but that also makes us uncomfortable to think that Jesus really is the Savior of the world, including those parts of the world we don't particularly like.

The disciples needed a new image of faith, the faith of the outsider, the Canaanite, the dirty dog. We need that view too, so that we don't take too much pride in our piety, our purity, our doctrine, or our liturgy. We don't deserve goodness from God. We're all like that poor Canaanite woman and we dare not try to fool Him with our righteous words. We're beggars, who have no greater prayer than, "*Lord, help me.*"

Every Sunday, our Lutheran worship puts us in the doghouse. Reminding us that we are all poor, miserable sinners. The Law does that. Declares us all to be dirty dogs. It shuts our mouths from every boasting we've learned to butter up God. It shows us just how selfish we have become in our perceptions of worship and service. You think it's bad? It's worse than you ever imagined. We're as good as dead dogs, says the Law.

But with the Lord, dogs get the crumbs that fall generously from the Master's table, and those crumbs give abundant life. "*Take, eat this is my Body given for you; take drink, this is my Blood shed for you.*" This is Jesus talking. The same Jesus who went to the dogs in His death on that garbage dump of a hill outside of Jerusalem where your sins and sin of the world were dealt with once and for all. Under the master's table the dogs have great and abundant life. You, who once were not a people, are now the people of God. Baptized. Forgiven. You, who have no right to eat and drink from the Master's table, have been given a place in the supper of the Lamb in His kingdom. You, who were conceived and born in sin and death, have been embraced in the death and life of Jesus.

Scripture calls it grace, undeserved kindness from the heart of God to the least, the lost, the dirty dog of a sinner, for Christ's sake. Amazing grace, universal grace. All in Jesus. And in Him, baptized and believing in Him, you are no longer dirty dogs but children of Abraham, sons and daughters of God, with a place at the Master's table. Amen.