

Matthew 15:21-28
Lent 2
Rev. Ryan Fouts
Holy Cross Lutheran Church – Sugar Loaf, IL

“And behold, a Canaanite woman from that region came out and was crying, ‘Have mercy on me, Or Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon. But he did not answer her a word.’”

“And behold, a Canaanite woman.” There’s something out of place about a Canaanite woman coming on the scene. After all, she was about as far from being a “jew” as you could get. The “beholds” in Scripture always evoke the readers attention. There are positive “beholds,” in Scripture. “Beholds” that draw us into the marvels, and the wonders. The miracles, and the saving acts of our Lord. But then there is this “behold.” It is almost as though it could be translated as, “Eww, Look!” It is the sort of “behold” that makes everyone want to look when someone outrageous looking walks into a room.

And this gentile woman, this Canaanite, comes crying after Jesus. Carrying on! Raving about her demon-oppressed daughter. Yet she knows the words which ought to evoke Jesus’ attention: She calls Him “Lord,” the “Son of David,” and pleas for His mercy!

Yet from Jesus there is only silence. He did not answer her a word.

There’s something a bit unsettling about Jesus’ silence. Say something to this poor woman. Do something. Jesus – have you forgotten who you are! Your silence is rude! You’re only embarrassing yourself, Jesus.

But luckily the disciples come to the rescue. They do not take offense at the woman’s words, they only want to spare themselves and Jesus the annoyance, and the embarrassment, of the crying

woman. “Send her away,” the disciples say, “for she is crying out after us.”

She had called to Him with all the right titles. “Lord,” and “Son of David.” And this cry, while met with a mute tongue, did not fall upon deaf ears. Even as the Canaanite woman calls Him Lord – He will be nothing less than Lord for her, even in His silence.

But if you find His silence offensive, just wait until he speaks. “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” It might have been better if Jesus had continued to act as though he had never heard her. It sounds like Jesus is only making more of an embarrassment of himself. And the woman persists, calling Him “Lord” again – “Lord, Help me.” So Jesus speaks the harshest words of all: *“It is not right to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs.”*

Brutal, demoralizing, devastating words. She’s bottomed out. Reduced to the dogs, reduced to nothing.

This doesn’t sound like the nice-guy Jesus we all would like to have as our Jesus. Gentile dogs – that’s the Canaanite woman, and that’s you too.

Jesus doesn’t speak words that will cater to your narcissism. Jesus won’t stroke your ego. He does not come to make you feel “extra special,” or to encourage you by flattering your so-called “good qualities.” He does not come teaching you to learn how to love yourself. Quite the opposite. Nothing special about you. You’re gentile dogs. No good qualities to puff up your ego.

Don’t you dare call Jesus “Lord,” if the only “Lording” you’ll have him do is the sort of “Lording” that is on your terms.

He will not content himself to be a second-class Lord, right beneath the Lord of your pride. If you are content for Jesus to be your co-pilot, then you'd better switch seats. For His Lordship will not submit to your idolatry, or self-Lording. So long as there is something in you that you are clinging to, taking pride in, judging Jesus by or trying to make Him fit into, then He cannot be Lord for you.

If the only words you'll take from Jesus are those that do not cause you personal offense, then you might as well go watch the Oprah show, or relish in what passes for Christian sentimentalism in your e-mail inbox. Pop-Christian culture has done wonders trying to fill the offense of Jesus' silence. But there is no way to get around the offense of Jesus words for the Canaanite woman, and His words for you. "It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs."

Thus, if He is to be your Lord, you must take hold of these words – even as the Canaanite woman did. His words call you "dogs," and so you are. Yet, in these words is all the Canaanite woman needs. For if she is a dog, then she is in on the scraps. Even the dogs have a Lord, and are nourished.

"She has him captive in His Words," says Luther, "and He loves to be thus taken captive." Great is your faith!

Had she come on the scene at the beginning of our Gospel, and Jesus would have answered her outright, giving her what she cried for, the healing of her daughter, she would have left and would have been happy. But she called Him Lord. And in so-doing, He became Lord for her. Lord, first, in His silence. Then Lord by reducing Her to nothing, destroying her pride --- to the place of the dogs, where faith takes hold of Him as Lord. Thus, she left not only with her daughter healed, but she left with Jesus. She left

with a faith that refused to allow Jesus to be anything other than the Lord He would be for Her.

Why go to a church where we're always harping on being sinners – particularly during Lent. “I, a poor, miserable, sinner.” These words do nothing for your pride. These are the words of gentile “dogs.” You and I, reduced to nothing according to Jesus' words, and the words of the law. Brutal, demoralizing, devastating words. Words that leave you bottomed out.

If all you want is a bit of an ego-boost, or a few words to let you know that you're “just all right,” or something uplifting, then there are churches out there that will tell you that. And you can go there, and you'll leave satisfied. But you won't leave with Jesus as Lord for you.

Poor, and miserable dogs. Sinners. That's you. That's me. But blessed we are! For with your confession – as you same-say, and take hold of Jesus' damning words – your faith takes the Lord captive in His promise. And He loves to be thus taken captive.

Thus who is worthy to feed from the master's table? Who is worthy, here, to approach His table, and feed upon His flesh and His blood? Only he whose faith takes Him captive in His words...

...He is truly worthy and well prepared who has faith in these words: Given, and shed for you, for the remission of sins. But he that does not believe these words, or doubts, is unworthy and unfit; for the words For you require altogether believing hearts.

There are many who come to our churches, who do not yet have faith in these words, yet desire to feast from the master's table. This is the glory of “closed communion.” These things are only

for those whom He has called the lost sheep of Israel – and many are turned away, never to return, due to a wounded pride. Thus, in their offense, they reveal that they are not yet willing for the Lord to usurp the lordship of their pride. They are not as yet willing to be reduced to the level of the dogs. Confirmation will do that nicely. With “closed communion” we bid our guests to do as the Canaanite woman, and take hold of His words. To sacrifice one’s pride, and cling to Christ as Lord of all. As the Canaanite woman, they take the Lord captive with His own Words: “This is my body... this is my blood... given and shed for you, for the remission of sins.” And when faith takes hold of those words – there is Great faith, refusing for the Lord to be any sort of Lord other than the Lord given and shed for you.

Our Lord Jesus, too, was reduced to nothing. Brutal, demoralizing, devastating. Bottomed out. Crucified as a common criminal, to the point that as the Psalmist writes, even the “dogs” encircled him. His hands and feet were pierced. Dying at the hands of a gentile cross, as the lost sheep of Israel shouted “crucify him.” There is nothing sentimental about the cross. Nothing that will boost the ego or the pride. All is gone. All is destroyed. All to nothing – to the grave. Dead. And the disciples were demoralized and devastated. Bottomed out.

Yet here in the grave the Word Made flesh, Jesus Christ, took hold of life again, and emerged from the bottom, into resurrection and life. Death to resurrection. Ascended on High, that He may be Lord for you.

So Lent continues. Take up your cross. His Word will crucify you, your pride, your ego, the idol you have falsely called “lord.” And left dead, with Christ, your great faith in His death will take Him captive in His promise and resurrection. Blessed are you! For though you are dogs – Jesus is your Lord. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

