

Great Faith

A sermon preached by
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Text:

Matthew 15:10-28

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Then he called the crowd to him and said to them, “Listen and understand: ¹¹it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but it is what comes out of the mouth that defiles.” ¹²Then the disciples approached and said to him, “Do you know that the Pharisees took offense when they heard what you said?” ¹³He answered, “Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted. ¹⁴Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind. And if one blind person guides another, both will fall into a pit.” ¹⁵But Peter said to him, “Explain this parable to us.” ¹⁶Then he said, “Are you also still without understanding? ¹⁷Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth enters the stomach, and goes out into the sewer? ¹⁸But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this is what defiles. ¹⁹For out of the heart come evil intentions, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander. ²⁰These are what defile a person, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile.”

²¹Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. ²²Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, “Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon.” ²³But he did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, “Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us.” ²⁴He answered, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” ²⁵But she came and knelt before him, saying, “Lord, help me.” ²⁶He answered, “It is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs.” ²⁷She said, “Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.” ²⁸Then Jesus answered her, “Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.” And her daughter was healed instantly.



First things first: I’m going to assume that Jesus is flat-out burned out, here. It’s the only way I can think of to excuse his behavior is

to assume he’s exhausted.... Empty..... in serious need of a day off. I know !!! Trust me ...Been there ...Done that!!!

I am also going to assume that he chose this location because he thought it would be a good place to hide. It’s a Canaanite district, Jesus was only a big name in Jewish circles, right? ...or so he thought! Unfortunately, I guess the word was out. At least it was out with this particular woman, who saw her chance and went for it

She had a sick daughter. It’s not clear what was wrong with the girl, but most of you know what having a sick child can do to a parent: it makes you desperate. I’ve watched over the years, my friends, my sister-in-law, my niece. I know how I feel when something is wrong with my nieces or nephew, my parents. You turn heaven and earth over to get the right answer. I just watched Colleen do it for Alex’s foot!!! A parent...a mother...will be relentless until they get a satisfactory answer, feel that they have done everything possible to get the best for their child. For that matter anyone would respond the same for any loved one!! In doing so, it makes you say horrible things to receptionists who stand in your way of an appointment, won’t give you something immediately. It makes you very rude to doctors who run tests and then tell you there’s nothing wrong or no hope. It makes you scream at the insurance company representative who tells you that your coverage does not include experimental treatments. It makes you stay up all night doing research on the internet, finding out where the best hospitals are, the best doctors, any possible treatments...can you change their food?? Reduce stress?? Who should you consult the nutritionist...a therapist?? What resources are available to you?? What Grants, Organizations?? Is there a healer to work their magic, a preacher with special healing powers one who promises their prayers bring miracles. Today you would take you pleas to television outlets to the social networks....Facebook, Twitter. Relentless in your pursuit!!!

Yes we know what having a sick child can do to a parent. But honestly, I’m a bit surprised that the disciples didn’t. "Send her

away," they grumble to Jesus; "she keeps shouting after us." Annoyed... as if they couldn't imagine why a mother would plant herself in front of the house where Jesus was, and not take no for an answer. As if they'd never heard of a parent shouting at the receptionist who won't let them past his or her desk, as if they'd never seen a beautiful girl being eaten alive by a disease no one understands, or addicted to drugs, growing thinner until you have to weigh her every day, and watch her every bite, because she can't help herself: as if some demon has her, not you, anymore; and no one can help her, except maybe Jesus—*This is why this mother is standing outside the door shouting at the disciples because they won't let her in !!*

It's not so hard for me or you to imagine.

But we don't know what's up with the disciples, why they've turned into bouncers at the door, but we do know what being overworked and underpaid, over-extended due to our fast paced lives can do to a person: it makes you tired, worn out, intolerant, grumpy. It makes you empty. It makes you feel unappreciated. It distances you from God. This I know....I have been there often. As someone who struggles to say no to requests...to invitations...to special projects at work, I definitely know this feeling. Especially in the spring, when it is the most intense time for workload in Hospital finances (budget season!!), an active event season for Wesleyan Circle, Lenten Season, upkeep of the house, spring clean-up...gardening...lots of family and friends birthdays....you get the picture I know ... it makes you numb, I become what I like to call after one of my favorite songs "Comfortably Numb". When this happens we stop seeing the faces of the people around us hungry with need; anyone else's plight; you start seeing only your own plight, time ticking away, not enough hours in the day, the never ending To-Do list, the chores piling up...overwhelmed everyone wanting something from you, unable to listen, shut out those who can be the most help, shut out God. I become short with those I most care about and who most care about me. You lose control of the filter between your

brain and what comes out of your mouth. I walk right over the homeless that I see every day and would otherwise help, I forget to say hello to people, smile at strangers. Things that are my trademark!! Instead I become annoyed by someone who doesn't get out of my way, no time to stop and buy a sandwich for the hungry soul, stop returning phone calls, push people away who are the prophet to call me out ...to help me back. When we get like this we stop having the ability to see the positive in any situation. We forget about others, we stop seeing the face of Christ in people that need us. When you can't see Christ, you can't do anything. You lash out at the smallest of annoyances.

Maybe that's why Jesus went away to Tyre and Sidon, so he could get back to the text, recharge his battery, back to that filled-up place that has so much to give, and all the time in the world to listen. No sooner does he check into his room, but there's someone shouting for him at the door.

"Send her away," the disciples grumble to Jesus. "She keeps shouting after us."

The phrase: *she keeps shouting after us*. Haven't we heard that before? Haven't we met people in the Bible who keep shouting after us, crying out to Israel? The Old Testament prophets, maybe? Shouting at Israel to "Get with it, for heaven's sake; get back to the text where you belong! Get back to the Word of God where you belong!" It makes me think about this woman, shouting after Jesus, crying out, just like the prophets did, just like they still do. She is being so annoying and so persistent and so loud that eventually Jesus has to pay attention to her, he you can tell she's just not going to shut up? She shouts things like:

What's the matter with you?

I don't recognize this behavior in you ...

You're not one of God's bouncers, you're one of God's ministers!

Just because you're tired, you think you have the right to say the first thing that comes into your head:

- *I'm sorry, the rabbi is not seeing anyone right now; please come back tomorrow during business hours.*
- *I'm sorry, I was sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, not to the Canaanite dogs, and it's not fair, is it, to take the children's bread and throw it to dogs?*

Isn't that the function of a prophet, to call us out?? To cry after us until we hit our heads on our own truth?

Jesus hits his head in this story, that's for sure. He hits his head right on his own words. That's what a prophet stirs in us, the memory of who we are, and what our mission is? This woman, this mother, shouts the *truth* at Jesus!

Who do I say that you are, Jesus?

- I say you are not the off-duty rabbi, and you are not God's Bouncer.
- I say you are the light of all nations.
- I say you are the way, the truth and the life, even for my Canaanite daughter, so get up and get with it!

That's the power of this passage. It is the way, the truth, the life, *and the way back*. The way back from Tyre and Sidon, from wherever it is we retreat to....our cocoon. The most annoying people are the ones who help us remember the truth. We need that wake-up call...that AH HA momentwhether it is a person in your face, words read, words spoken... to snap you out of your funk!! This woman was that to Jesus.

So who is this woman? This woman that Jesus describes as having "great faith"??

She was a Canaanite, a rural peasant, from this region of Tyre and Sidon. These were Phoenician cities just beyond the northern border of Israel. The people were pagans, they worshiped Phoenician gods, they weren't Jewish. There was strong animosity between Jews and Canaanites that existed since the time of Noah. This along with other historical events would make Canaanites not very friendly towards Jews nor towards the Jewish God.

So...why would this woman approach Jesus? Could it be that she had nowhere else to turn? Perhaps she had heard reports about the healing miracles of Jesus. Her need was so great, her concern for her daughter so deep, that she dared to cross that rift between Jews and Canaanites. She was desperate ... at her wits end....at the point where she had nothing to lose, and perhaps everything to gain. She comes and cries out to Jesus for help. A similar cry to what was made by Peter when he sank into the sea.

This woman was not content to be ignored, she was convinced that her daughter deserved to be given a chance at living a normal, productive life. Her persistence, based on her faith in a God who can change things for the better, is rewarded.

So What makes "Great Faith"??

There are two types of faith: Faith where we say; I believe but fail to move on what we believe. And "Great Faith", persistent faith, faith that refuses to give up because of a lack of response or a response that is not what you want to hear. Real faith is more than just saying that you have faith. It's moving on God's principles even though the odds may be against you. JAMES 2:18 says; "But someone may say, you have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works".

There are only two people in the Bible that were said to have "GREAT FAITH" by Jesus. One was the Roman Centurion, who came to Jesus in Capernaum seeking help for his servant and the

other this woman. Both of whom were Gentiles and probably considered not worthy of receiving anything from God because of it. The Canaanite woman is described by Jesus as having a "great faith" yet, she didn't walk on water, as Peter did last week; she didn't move a mountain; she probably had never been to church in her life; she certainly had never read the Bible. What's so great about her faith?

It is Jesus who calls her a woman of great faith. She didn't approach Jesus talking about how great her faith was: "I really believe in you, so you should do this for me."

She didn't approach Jesus with anything "great": no great faith, no great obedience, no great religious piety. She comes with a great nothing: no Jewish faith, not knowing or keeping God's commandments, if she had any religious training, it wasn't centered on the God of Israel. Perhaps we can define her great faith as coming to Jesus with nothing -- nothing to offer him, yet trusting him to give her what she needed.

Her "great faith" comes closely after Peter's "little faith" last week. This is not accidental, she is a contrast to Peter. If she had said, "If you are the Son of David, command my daughter to be healed," she would have been in the same category as Peter; or worse, acting like the Tempter.

Her faith comes from the insideshe had none of the outside trappings of piety or holiness.

This woman of Great Faith...this desperate mother faced obstacles:

Jesus was silent. Perhaps He wanted her to exercise her faith and put it into action. There are many times in our own lives when we ask God for a specific thing over and over and don't see any results. All we get is silence from God and we think that He is not listening. He may be putting our faith to the test!!! I'm thinking we can all relate to this one. I know I can !!!

Another obstacle ~ Rejection from the disciples. Has someone ever rejected you? I'm thinking I would get a lot of if not 100% response if I asked for a raise of hands. Don't let that become the obstacle between you and God. Be persistent in your pursuit...your prayer....it just may be the difference between receiving your miracle or not. This woman was not going to let her opportunity pass her by. Even though the disciples asked Jesus to send her away she kept on coming.

She felt she was Undeserving. She was a Gentile, a sinner and a woman, three strikes against her in Jewish society. This didn't stop her. She is living proof that you should never let anyone make you feel that you are not worthy!!

There were several things about this woman that moved God into action:

She was short and to the point. She didn't have time for the long religious prayer. She needed her miracle now!!! Her plea: "HAVE MERCY ON ME SON OF DAVID, MY DAUGHTER HAS A DEMON"...."HELP ME".

She was humble. Being humble is a condition of the heart. "HUMBLE YOURSELF IN THE SIGHT OF THE LORD AND HE WILL LIFT YOU UP".

She was fervent showing great emotion, it wasn't external emotionalism, no showy scene of sobbing, throwing hands in the air, her emotion came from her innermost being and all of the sudden she became a worshipper of God, "SHE CAME AND KNEELING, WORSHIPED HIM".

She was desperate. She was full of despair, overcome by a sense of defeat, perhaps she had tried everything else and this was her only hope. Maybe she had gone to the exorcist and he couldn't do anything; to the physicians and they couldn't do anything; to the sorcerer and he couldn't do anything. And all of the sudden she

found out that Jesus was in town and something inside of her jumped and gave her witness that this was her day!!!

She was rational. She knew that Jesus could do it. She wasn't asking for something that was impossible. This wasn't a luxury, it was a necessity. Did you ever thinkmaybe often times we don't get what we ask for because it's not really necessary?

She was worshipful, respectful and acknowledged who Jesus was, she addresses Him as Lord, Son of David, asks for His mercy.

GREAT FAITH MOVES GOD!!! GREAT FAITH MOVES MOUNTAINS !!!! Remember two things in this message recharge your batteries... take a day off ...make time for yourself and God...don't become: Comfortably numb.... Don't let yourself get to a place where you forget to see the face of Christ in those in need and Go forth and be a prophet be persistent break down barriers don't let obstacles stand in the way Reach inside..... be of Great Faith !!