

Sermon for August 16, 2026 – The Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost

Matthew 15:21-28 (EHV)

Theme: Jesus' Mercy is for You.

- 1) Even when He seems to ignore your cries,
- 2) Even when His answer seems harsh,
- 3) He is faithful to all His promises.

²¹Jesus left that place and withdrew into the region of Tyre and Sidon. ²²There a Canaanite woman from that territory came and kept crying out, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David! A demon is severely tormenting my daughter!" ²³But he did not answer her a word. His disciples came and pleaded, "Send her away, because she keeps crying out after us." ²⁴He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." ²⁵But she came and knelt in front of him, saying, "Lord, help me." ²⁶He answered her, "It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to their little dogs." ²⁷"Yes, Lord," she said, "yet their little dogs also eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." ²⁸Then Jesus answered her, "Woman, your faith is great! It will be done for you, just as you desire." And her daughter was healed at that very hour.

"Is God listening to my prayers? Sometimes, the more I cry out to him, the worse my situation gets."

Have you ever felt this way? I certainly have. God invites me to pray persistently in faith, promising to answer His loved ones mercifully. Sadly, the only response I sometimes feel is... silence. The devil tempts me to wonder if I am beyond God's mercy. Am I?

The Holy Spirit recorded today's sermon text for just such moments. At first glance, Jesus seems harsh and cruel, but He reveals that all His ways are loving – even when they don't seem so.

With the evangelist Matthew as our guide, let us learn that: **Jesus' mercy is for you.**

- 1) Even when He seems to ignore your cries,
- 2) even when His answer seems harsh,
- 3) He is faithful to all His promises.

Part One: Even when He seems to ignore your cries.

Our text begins with Jesus wanting some alone time with His disciples, out of the public eye. Therefore, *Jesus left that place and withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon*, which is in the far northwestern tip of Israel. Why go there? Because the largely Gentile population of that region would not know the prophecies concerning the Messiah as those in the Jewish regions. This would give Jesus a chance to teach His disciples unbothered.

But: *There a Canaanite woman from that territory came and kept crying out, “Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David! A demon is severely tormenting my daughter!”*

The Holy Spirit emphasizes that this woman was a Canaanite. Do you remember who they were? They were the people who lived in the land before Israel’s exodus from Egypt. The LORD found their beliefs and practices so horrendous that He told the Israelites to rid the land of them.ⁱ The Jews of Jesus’ day considered the Canaanites such vile people that they called them “wild dogs.”

This woman, therefore, would be one of the last people we would imagine recognizing Jesus, let alone asking Him for mercy. And yet she not only recognized Him, but confessed Him as “Lord” and “the Son of David” – a very specific Jewish title for the Messiah that had its origin in God’s promise to David concerning a future descendant, who would rule over His kingdom forever. God would be His Father, and He would be His Son.ⁱⁱ Her use of these titles reveals her knowledge and faith in God’s Old Testament promises.

Not only does she trust Jesus is the Messiah foretold in Scripture, but she also trusts that the Lord will have mercy on her daughter, even though she is a Canaanite. And why would Jesus help her? Because the Old Testament promises that the Messiah’s mercy would extend to all people, regardless of their nationality. We even heard an example of this in our first lesson from Isaiah.ⁱⁱⁱ

I want to pause for a moment and reflect on this woman some more. She is a Gentile, far removed from Jesus’ earthly ministry, and yet she confessed greater insight into who Jesus is than all the Bible scholars of Israel. She even seems to have a greater understanding of Jesus’ mission than His own disciples! Moreover, she not only possesses this knowledge but also expresses it in genuine, humble faith.

But he did not answer her a word. When you read this account in the Gospel of Mark, you get the sense that this woman kept following Jesus, making a scene as she cried out after Him; but He remained silent, almost acting as if He didn't care.

Why would Jesus do that? Hearing about her daughter's suffering, my heart, sinful as it is, still bleeds for this mother. Why, then, was Jesus silent? He had His reasons, which we may never know nor understand. But note that, throughout His silence, He never once tried to stop her from crying out after Him. She was confident that He would hear her and show His promised mercy and love. How did she know? Because the Holy Spirit – working through God's Old Testament promises – convinced her of these facts. That is why she continued pleading, even when Jesus was silent.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, are you as convinced of Jesus' mercy and power to help you as this woman was? Do you know the Bible well enough to call Him "the Son of David" - understanding what that means and applying it to your situation? Do you continue to call out for His mercy in humble trust - even when your prayers are met with silence? Oh, how easily we sin by doubting the Bible's promises that speak of our Saviour's wonderful mercy and power for us!

But, the LORD is faithful to all His promises – not only when He seems to ignore our cries, but even when His answer seems harsh.

Part Two: Even when His answer seems harsh.

The situation seemed to go from bad to worse for the Canaanite woman. We read: *His disciples came and pleaded, "Send her away, because she keeps crying out after us."*

Don't take the disciples' words to mean they were asking Jesus to dismiss the woman without helping her. I believe they wanted Jesus to help her, just not for the right reasons. Jesus came to this region to be inconspicuous, but this woman was causing a scene. I imagine them thinking, "Just grant her request and let her be on her way. Then we can get back to doing what we came here to do."

But Jesus knew it was not that simple. Addressing the disciples in earshot of the woman, *He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."*

Even though Jesus is the Saviour of all, God the Father intended His earthly ministry to be only among the Jews. They were the LORD's straying sheep, whom He sought to save. While Jesus certainly helped and healed Gentiles during His ministry, all those instances were in Israel in fulfilment of what the Scriptures prophesied concerning Jesus' earthly ministry.

The woman heard what Jesus said and understood. But even that didn't deter her from trusting in her Messiah's mercy. Instead of telling Jesus what He should do, *she*, in an act of worship, *came and knelt in front of him, saying, "Lord, help me."*

He answered her, "It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to their little dogs."

Doesn't your jaw want to drop at Jesus' response? He just called that woman a dog! True: He did not call her "a wild dog" like the Pharisees would have done; using a word meaning "pet dog" instead. Still, by calling her a dog, Jesus seemed to insinuate that God did not intend Gentiles like her to be the objects of Jesus' earthly ministry.

What would you do if Jesus said this to you? Would you be offended? Would you leave in despair, thinking, "There's no room for me in God's house because I am an outsider." I know I would be tempted to think such things at Jesus' words.

But look at the woman's response. The first thing she says is, "*Yes, Lord.*" With that short statement, she confesses her unworthiness: "I admit that I have no right to expect anything from you as an undeserving sinner. You are correct: the Scriptures say that your earthly ministry is to be directed towards the Jews and not Gentiles like me. They are your covenant people and need you to feed them first with your salvation."

"Yet their little dogs also eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." With this statement, the woman confesses: "Lord, even though your earthly ministry is meant for the Jews, I know I belong to you and am loved – not because of any special covenant you made with my people, but because your grace lets me be in your house and under your table. I have no right to call myself your child the way the Jews do, but I know that, according to your great kindness, you will allow morsels of mercy to fall to me. That is why I kneel here begging for your help – like a pet dog at a dinner table – trusting in the saving mercy and love you have towards all people that the Old Testament promised you to have."

Part Three: He is faithful to all His promises.

The woman was right to believe what she confessed about Jesus' mission to the Jews and His mercy for all, a mercy God explicitly expressed in today's first reading from Isaiah. She was right to confess her unworthiness. More than that, she was right to trust in Jesus' undeserved love – even when He was silent to her cry for help.

The LORD is always faithful to all His promises. The Bible says: *“God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he changes his mind. Does he say something, and then not carry it out? Does he speak, and then not bring it about?”*^{iv} While sometimes it seems like God will not listen and act according to His grace, He always does. God does not reveal to us all the reasons He does or does not do the things we ask for in prayer. Truth be told, we may never understand His reasons because His wisdom is beyond anything we could ever imagine.

But we can always trust His mercy, love, and faithfulness – regardless of how things seem. The Canaanite woman understood this, which is why she ceaselessly called on Him for mercy with the same tenacity as Old Testament Jacob, when he wrestled with God at the Jabbok river - not letting God go until He blessed him. Both Jacob and the Canaanite woman in our text trusted God's unwavering commitment to His promises. They believed God's promised mercy was for them, just as it is for you, and every person who walks through the doors of our Church, regardless of who they are, where they came from, or what they have done. God wants all people to be saved, which is why He works through His Word and Sacraments to call all people to repentance. Rejoice in the Gospel promises God not only used to awaken faith in your heart to receive His grace, but continues to use to strengthen you in your faith.

Jesus replied, *“Woman, your faith is great! It will be done for you, just as you desire.” And her daughter was healed at that very hour.*

Brothers and sisters in Christ: because of sin, we are all undeserving dogs before the LORD; but He loves us anyway. He loves us so much that He suffered and died on the cross in payment for our sins. It is finished; all guilt is gone before God. He accepts you as His child for Jesus' sake, as the Apostle Paul once wrote: *In fact, you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. Indeed, as many of you as were baptized into Christ have been clothed with Christ. There is not Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female, for you are all one and the same in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants and heirs according to the promise.*^v

Yes, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, learn from the account of the Canaanite woman that **Jesus' mercy is for you.** Even when He seems to ignore your cries, even when His answer seems harsh, He remains faithful to all His promises. Amen.

ⁱ Cf. Deuteronomy 9:5

ⁱⁱ cf. 2 Samuel 7:12-16

ⁱⁱⁱ Cf. Isaiah 56:6-8

^{iv} Numbers 23:19 EHV

^v Cf. Galatians 3:26-29