

Matthew 15:10-28 12th Sunday after Pentecost August 18, 1996

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

"Lynn, would you like a muffin?"

I'd just finished my cereal, was reading the paper when this question knocked at the edge of my consciousness. But it didn't quite get in.

"Lynn, would you like a muffin?"

This time the knock on the door of my consciousness was a little louder.

"What?" I asked.

"Lynn would you like a muffin."

"No thanks."

"Have mercy on me Lord, Son of David."

Silence.

"Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David."

No answer.

"Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David."

"Jesus, send her away, she keeps shouting after us."

"I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

Were the sheep on his mind that day? The lambs that had left the flock?. Had the shepherd left the flock behind in order to search for the one that was lost? Well nothing would distract the shepherd from finding that lamb, not even a shouting woman.

But she came then and knelt before him..... begging? worshipping?

"Lord, help me."

She had Jesus' attention now, but not his heart. His response: "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs."

The children: Israel, the people that God had chosen. For nearly two thousand years God had been their God and they had been God's people – ever since that moment of calling Abraham, and the laughter in heaven and on earth when Isaac was born to the old woman Sarah.

One morning in Egypt the Lord had watched with Miriam to see if Pharaoh's daughter would rescue the baby floating in the reed basket on the Nile River.

At the Red Sea the Lord heard this same Miriam sing of the victory of the Lord over the horses and chariots of Pharaoh's army, drowning them in the sea after the children of Israel had walked through the sea on dry ground.

The Lord had heard when a daughter named Hannah begged and prayed for a child, and gave her a son in her old age, Samuel.

Through kings and conquests and defeat and exile the Lord had been their God, Israel, God's people. Now Jesus had been sent by God to gather the lost sheep.

But this woman of the land, part of the people God had pushed aside to make room for Israel now knelt before Jesus and pleaded, "Lord, have mercy."

Jesus answered her, "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs."

"Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table."

Then Jesus answered her, "Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish!" And her daughter was healed instantly.

Here on earth we honor Peter and John and James, I and others like me wear fancy robes and receive honor and respect from all of you. But in heaven where things are seen as they really are, does Peter wait at table for this woman who would not even let Jesus himself crush her faith in Jesus?

Behind closed doors, in kitchens, in poverty, through abuse, in pain women with no names that we know have pleaded for their children. Their prayers have been persistent; the silence of God has been met with worship, with more fervent begging.

Some were slaves, some were the poor of the cities and countryside of Europe, some have been among us here - are with us here this day. "Great is your faith," says Jesus. "Let it be done for you as you wish."

Yet finally this story is not about a woman's faith, but is about the Son of David, Son of God, who was her help. Great faith means nothing, unless that faith is in Jesus.

He is the shepherd who laid down his life for the sheep. He is the bread that is broken into crumbs so that everyone not invited to the world's table might be fed.

You are fed with the crumbs that are his body. And his life is in you, grows in you. And you are children with Sarah, and Miriam, and Hannah - with Mary and Mary Magdalene, and Peter and James and John, and with the woman whose name we do not know. She knew that Jesus was the one who could help.

And so do you.