

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.

Somalia.

Last week one of you wrote on the prayer board the request that we pray for the children of Somalia.

Since last Sunday I read an article in the Christian Science Monitor Magazine about the drought in Somalia with a picture of one of those children of Somalia. The child was being treated for malnutrition which makes him one of the lucky ones – not the malnutrition part but the being treated for part. Most are receiving no help at all.

But we have our own problems, do we not? Stocks tumbling, fear and anxiety mounting, more houses sinking below the waterline. Maybe next year we will be the children of Somalia – better keep our minds focused on us – our children, our needs, our future. Yes, better just to keep our minds on us.

So the disciples and Jesus thought that day when a Canaanite woman came out and started shouting, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon." When the disciples urged Jesus to send her away Jesus told her, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." Better to keep our minds on us he must have been thinking.

But she came and knelt before him saying, "Lord help me."

The very same cry that last week we heard Peter cry when he began to sink beneath the waves. "Lord, help me." And that time out on the stormy sea Jesus did, he reached out and grabbed Peter, helped Peter, saved Peter and brought him safely into the boat. But this woman has no seat in that boat with Jesus and his disciples – she is outside of their family circle, outside of their concern, outside. So this is the word Jesus spoke to her, "It is not fair to take the

children's food and throw it to the dogs." Now that makes sense. If children were starving and a father fed the dogs out back instead of his children we would demand that that father be locked up. Children come before dogs.

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

Then Jesus answered, "Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish." At that instant the demon left the woman's daughter.

The only thing helping her cost Jesus was a change in his attitude. The dog who asked for a crumb was given a place at the table – feasting on Jesus' power poured out in the healing of her daughter. The outsider was in. And she was a Canaanite, one of the very people whom the Lord had commanded Israel to slaughter. In the 20th chapter of Deuteronomy speaking through Moses the Lord spoke this command: "As for the towns of the peoples that the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance you must not let anything that breathes remain alive. You shall annihilate them, the Hittites and the Amorites, the Canaanites and the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites." But Israel never completely carried out this command – some of the people they killed, some remained alive. So it was that more than a thousand years later Jesus encountered this Canaanite woman. Instead of slaughtering her he healed her daughter.

When I read in that article that the Somolians are Muslim, compassion and concern in my heart were dialed down. It was not something I thought about – just something that happens in me when the suffering one is not part of my group – a Mormon, a Jehovah's Witness, a Buddhist, for me they are all outside, the way this woman who came to Jesus that day was outside. But even though Jesus had already given up hope for her she had not given up hope in him.

My heart is not big enough to hold the whole world in it. But I believe the heart of God is. I cannot imagine that this story about the Canaanite woman and Jesus could have ended differently. I believe that anyone who calls on Jesus for help will be heard.

Insiders – outsiders – the ways we decide who belongs in the boat and who does not are very important to us – our creeds and our doctrines, our ways of saying who is a member and who is not – these things matter to us. But these things may not matter so much to God. Loving, helping, listening, praying these may matter most of all to God.

Pray for the children of Somalia – that was the request. Who knows what the prayer might bring - rain – food aid from nations that have an abundance of food – an end to hostilities there – a change in your heart or mine that would lead us to share?

Maybe you will become like the Canaanite woman, pleading to God for one in need and changing the very heart of Jesus. Who knows?