



Today's Gospel lesson features a conversation between Jesus and a woman described by St. Matthew as "a Canaanite." It is a bit of a puzzling description, since the Canaanites were an ancient people who lived in Palestine before it was conquered by Israel.

By some estimates they had ceased to exist around 1100 B.C. or so.

So, technically, Jesus couldn't have been approached by a woman who actually was a Canaanite.

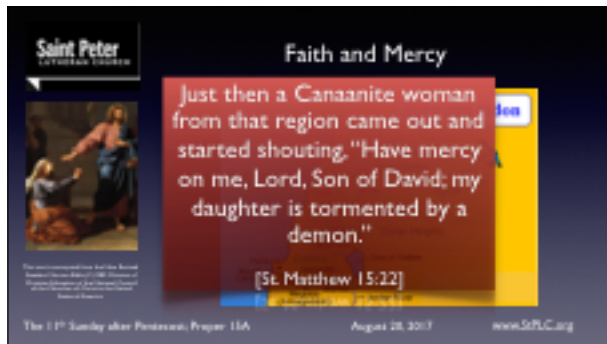
The term may have been used to describe people who were not Jewish, and who lived in the same region where the Canaanites once lived.

It seems, at the very least, that what St. Matthew is doing here is describing a woman who clearly is outside the boundaries of traditional Jewish circles.



This is supported by the geography of today's Gospel. If you'll remember from last week, Jesus is teaching and preaching and healing in and around Gennesaret, on the north-west shore of the Sea of Galilee.

He's not all that far from Nazareth, where he grew up, or from Capernaum, where St. Matthew says Jesus made his home as an adult.



As today's story begins, Matthew reports that Jesus has left that area, and made his way to Tyre and Sidon — quite a distance away, on the shore of the Mediterranean sea.

This is far from the center of social and religious life for first century Jews.

It is here that this woman approaches him.

It is a rather bold approach for a first century woman.

She is shouting at him, and begging him to help her daughter. The strength of her behavior indicates the depth of her anguish.

She is very worried about her daughter.



So we have a woman in deep need.

Whose heart is broken by the troubles of her daughter.

She is described by St. Matthew as an outsider, living far beyond the traditional centers of first century Judaism.

Given what we know about Jesus, she seems like a perfect candidate to become a recipient of God's grace, right?

You wouldn't be the least bit surprised if he had immediately followed her home and healed her daughter.

5



That's why Jesus' first response to her is so troubling. Instead of helping her, he seems to demean her. He first declares that she is outside the boundaries of his mission. And then compares her to a dog, lying at the foot of the table, begging for a piece of meat. It is a disturbing response, to say the least.

6



There have been many attempts to excuse Jesus over the years. Some claim that this shows his humanness; and how this experience expands his own understanding of what it will mean for him to be Messiah. Some claim he is testing this woman — or his disciples — playing games with them, to see how they will respond. Some claim that he is simply beginning with where they were — nobody in the first century would have expected a Jewish religious leader to respond well here — but he is doing so in order to bring them where he wants them to end up. 2,000 years later, there is no agreement over which of these explanations holds the most water. Which probably means none of them are ultimately satisfying... Truth is: we really don't know why Jesus acts the way he does in the opening verses of this Gospel.

7

**Saint Peter**  
LITURGICAL LECTURE

Faith and Mercy

Then Jesus answered her, "Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish." And her daughter was healed instantly.  
[St. Matthew 15:28]

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But trying to read the minds of any Biblical characters, much less the mind of Jesus, is always fraught with difficulty. Maybe it suffices to take our focus off how the story begins, And pay attention to where it ends. Which is in verse 28. Jesus commends this woman's faith. He declares that healing will come to her daughter. And immediately it happens. This young woman, whose behavior had caused the whole town to conclude that she was tormented by a demon, is put well again by the word of Jesus.

8

**Saint Peter**  
LITURGICAL LECTURE

Faith and Mercy

Disciples ≠ Jesus  
Disciples ≠ Woman  
Jesus ≠ Jesus  
Exclusion ≠ Inclusion  
Condemnation ≠ Love & Mercy

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As we look at the arc of this story, we discover that certain contrasts have become apparent.

- (1) Between the disciples (who want to send this woman away) and Jesus (who engages her).
- (2) Between the disciples (who seem irritated at her) and this woman (who humbles herself, and asks for help).
- (3) Between the first response of Jesus (to withhold assistance) and his final response (to commend her, and heal her daughter).

What we see is a transition from exclusion to inclusion. From condemnation to love and mercy.

9

**Saint Peter**  
CATHOLIC LITURGY

Faith and Mercy

Exclusion vs Inclusion  
Condemnation vs Love & Mercy

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From this perspective, today's story becomes an invitation to us.  
An invitation to explore how we respond when someone who appears as an outsider is in a time of need.

How we respond when we are presented with someone who is different from us in significant ways.

How we respond when we realize the need to part ways with cherished beliefs and convictions to make room for something new.

And, of course, by implication:

How God responds to us when we find ourselves in a time of need, and longing for the power of God's love and grace.

10

**Saint Peter**  
CATHOLIC LITURGY

Faith and Mercy

faith (fayth) noun

1. strong belief in God or in the doctrines of a religion, based on spiritual apprehension rather than proof  
"She gave her life for her faith."  
synonyms: belief, ideology, creed, teaching, doctrine

2. complete trust or confidence in someone or something  
"This restores one's faith in politicians."  
synonyms: trust, belief, confidence, conviction

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Ultimately, this story is about faith.

And let's clarify one thing — we talked about this a bit last week — faith is not getting the content of believing right.

Faith is not achieving some high level of spiritual accomplishment.

Faith is not something we conjure up on our own.

Faith is relinquishing the fantasy that we can do it on our own, and allowing God to do it for us.

In this case, it is the ability to trust God above all else.

Not depending on our own capacity to earn our way in.

In fact, not even depending on our own ability to believe (as Martin Luther taught us).

But setting all that aside, and acknowledging that only God is the source of our hope — of our wellbeing.



11

In this morning's Gospel, we have a glimpse of this kind of faith.  
This Canaanite woman is in a terrible position.

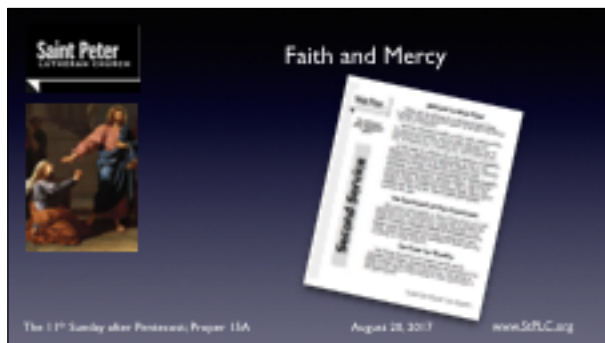
The person she loves with all her heart — her own daughter — is not well, and there is nothing she can do about it.

So in faith she turns her own daughter over to Jesus, and his healing power.

What might we learn from her?

We learn that the life of faith has not to do with who we are, or where we've come from, or what we've accomplished.

It has to do with humbling ourselves, and turning to God who has promised to do what needs to be done.



12

This about it: this is why we begin every worship service with confession and forgiveness.

This is why we cry out in the Kyrie for God to have mercy on us. This is why we gather around the table, at the foot of the cross.

None of us are here because we deserve it.

Instead: all of us are here as a gift.

The same gift given to this woman in the 15th chapter of Matthew.

The gift of being fully welcomed, even when others might exclude us.

It's the gift God promises to give us every time we gather here together.

The gift we are called to share with the entire world.

No matter who they are.

No matter where they've come from.

No matter what they've accomplished.

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**Saint Peter**  
LITURGICAL GUIDES

Faith and Mercy

Welcomed into God's Love  
just as we are

Sent into God's World  
to be a reflection of Christ

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So let us receive this gift today, as this woman did.  
 And let us become vehicles of this gift,  
 In our homes,  
 In our neighborhoods,  
 In our schools, our our place of work,  
 Here in our congregation,  
 In our nation,  
 And throughout the whole world.  
 It is how we have chosen to describe ourselves at Saint Peter.  
 It is a faithful response to the hearing of this Gospel lesson.  
 It is what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ.  
 Amen.

14



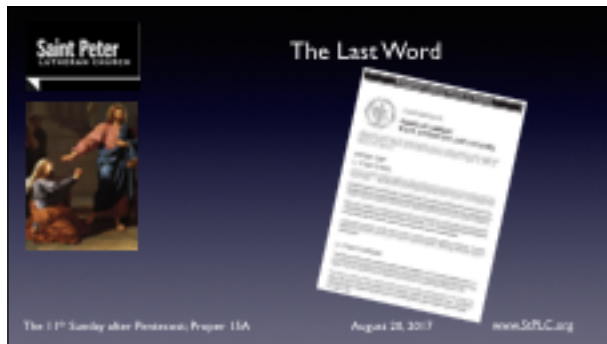
**Saint Peter**  
LITURGICAL GUIDES

**Take It Home!**

Let's keep the conversation going.  
 Our hosts will have a 7-day devotional  
 guide for you as you leave today.  
 Question for this evening's  
 conversation: "I"

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As you leave today, our hosts have a 7-day devotional for you.  
 Let's spend the next couple of days reflecting on this morning,  
 and preparing ourselves for next Sunday.



15

I'm going to take a different course this week with the last word. Usually I try to offer a quote that captures what it means to live a Christ-centered life.

Today I've got an ELCA social statement for you.

It has to do with Race, Ethnicity and Culture.

If we are committed to being a reflection of Christ in this world, then we are committed to being as merciful as he is.

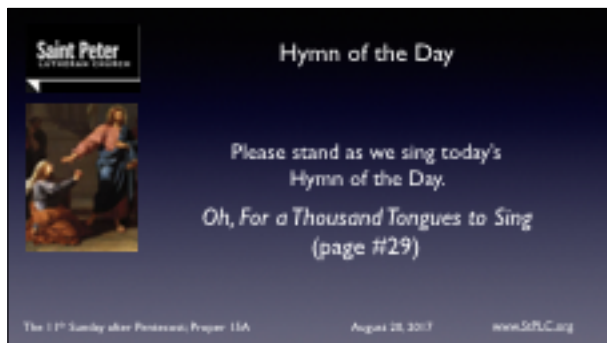
This has been a practice of our denomination for a long time.

A number of you have asked me what Lutherans have to say about race relations, especially given what happened in Charlottesville.

Many of us are talking — maybe even posting about this.

If we are going to do so, then let's make sure our message is consistent with our Scriptures and our faith.

I would commend this study to you — I think it will be helpful as you look for ways to witness to your faith in the midst of this.



16

Please stand with us as we sing today's Hymn of the Day.


Oh, For a Thousand Tongues to Sing  
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17

**Saint Peter**  
LITURGICAL CALENDAR

**St. Matthew 15:21-28**



<sup>21</sup> Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. <sup>22</sup> 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." <sup>23</sup> 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." <sup>24</sup> He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

The iconography of the Holy Family  
depicted in this scene is the work of  
the workshop of the Flemish painter  
Hieronymus Bosch.


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18

**Saint Peter**  
LITURGICAL CALENDAR

**St. Matthew 15:21-28**



<sup>25</sup> But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me." <sup>26</sup> He answered, "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." <sup>27</sup> She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." <sup>28</sup> Then Jesus answered her, "Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish." And her daughter was healed instantly.

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