

A Sermon for the Second Sunday in Lent  
St. Matthew 15:21-28  
by Peter Bockoven

**21** And Jesus went away from there and withdrew to the district of Tyre and Sidon. **22** And behold, a Canaanite woman from that region came out and was crying, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon." **23** But he did not answer her a word. And his disciples came and begged him, saying, "Send her away, for she is crying out 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** And he answered, "It is not right to take the children's bread 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, "O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire." And her daughter was healed instantly.

I'm sure many of you have seen footage of the war going on in Ukraine. What terrible circumstances.

Terrible circumstances. And yet despite them, there have been recorded many instances of heroism and bravery.

One instance is seen in a recording of Ukrainian Christians, standing in the subway station at Kiev, on their way to evacuate.

The threat of war was over their heads. Certainly, they were afraid and terrified.

But despite their horrible circumstances, they were singing hymns to God together, expressing their hope in God through Christ.

Their circumstances revealed something about their faith. The circumstances of our Gospel lesson also reveal something about the faith of the Canaanite woman. And not only of the Canaanite woman, but of all who trust in Christ. They reveal that *faith is persistent*:

1. In trials.
2. Because of Christ.

In the story of the Canaanite woman, we see a woman, in the midst of trials, persistently trusting in Christ, because of who he is. It's an illustration of God's people: they frequently go through many trials, and yet they continue to trust in Christ, because of who he is.

So who was this Canaanite woman?

A greatly troubled person. Her daughter was possessed by a demon. Clearly the woman loved her daughter greatly, since she was seeking help for her.

She's a woman who apparently heard about Jesus. She recognized that he would be able to help her and her daughter.

And she was a Canaanite. That is, not an Israelite, not a Jew. Or, at least not a pure Israelite. Perhaps she was a descendant of the nations that Israel fought against, when they first inhabited Canaan under Joshua. Or perhaps she was one of the Samaritans living in the area: a descendant of Israel and of the Gentiles, after Israel was destroyed by the Assyrians.

And she's a woman who was pestering Christ and his disciples, asking for mercy and help. And she was asking continually, despite the trials she was going through. Take a look at the steps of the story:

First she cries out, asking Christ for mercy for her daughter. Christ ignores her: he doesn't say a word. The disciples ask Christ to send her away. And he says that he was sent to the lost sheep of Israel. To the Jewish people, primarily. Not for her.

Next she kneels down before Christ. She asks for help. Jesus answers her. He says it's not right to give the children's bread to the dogs.

These events illustrate some of the trials that God's people go through. Christ was silent to the woman: so he sometimes seems silent to us when we ask him for help.

Christ says that he was sent for Israel, not for Canaan. So it sometimes seems that Christ isn't meant for us.

Christ compares her to a dog, as one not worthy to receive the children's food. So also we sometimes feel unworthy to be fed by Christ.

You see, faith in Christ is a confidence that he is our Savior. But it is an imperfect confidence in this life. It is a confidence that sometimes, and for some, frequently, has to battle against doubts and trials of many kinds.

Why? Jesus said to his disciples in Gethsemane: "The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." We have both spirit and flesh in us. Spirit, the new man, given to us by God, that trusts in him. Flesh, our natural powers, that drive us away in God.

And even if the flesh were not still in us; even if our faith were perfect, we would still have various troubles. Even inward turmoil. Why? Because we are in the world. So Jesus says in the Gospel of John: "In the world you will have tribulation."

So we have trials and troubles; we have doubts of various kinds. But these don't mean we don't have faith in Christ. These are simply the things through which faith endures.

But why does faith endure, despite these things? Not because of any power in us: but because of Christ. Who Christ is, and what he does for us.

This is why the Canaanite woman was able to endure her trials and discouragements. From the beginning, we see that her faith is grounded not in herself, but in Christ.

At the beginning, she calls him Lord and Son of David. She asks for mercy. So we see that she knew who Christ was and what his work is. He's the Son of David, the promised Messiah. He's

the one sent to deliver all people from sin, death, and the devil. His work is to forgive, to comfort, and to show mercy.

That's why she endured. She knew Christ. Christ was the object of her faith. Not anything in herself. Not anything in the world. Faith endures, because Christ endures: unchanging, unalterable, immovable, forever.

And just as the Canaanite woman endured because Christ, so do we.

Christ is the eternal Son of God. With his Father and the Holy Spirit, he's one God forever. Nothing can change that. That depends on nothing. All created things ultimately depend on God. They exist because he sustains them. But God depends on nothing. He's the one who always has, and always will, exist.

And he's the one who always has, and always will, love his people. The Father is the one who sent his Son into the world to save you. Christ is the one who willingly laid down his life, out of love for you. That's a fact of history: and history can't be changed.

You're baptized into Christ. You're baptized into his death and resurrection. By Baptism, you have died to sin and risen back to life in the spirit. You have forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation by faith, given to you by God's Spirit. Like Jesus' death for you, your baptism into Christ is another fact of history: and history can't be changed.

The Lord gives you his body and blood in the Lord's Supper. When you eat the bread and drink the wine, you eat the body and blood of Christ. The sure sign that all of your sins are forgiven before God. Here, Christ is present with you: that's simply a fact.

Christ is the immovable rock of our faith, who causes us to endure through all of our trials.

Remember those Ukrainian Christians singing in the subway? I asked a friend for a translation of the hymn they were singing. And these were some of the words:

"I know that you will be with us in your temple in heaven. Joy and peace you have given us. You gave your life for your people, and wrote us into the book of life."

Through their trouble, they sang together about their confidence of God's presence. Of his help. Of the joy and life that he gives his people.

Not because they weren't afraid. Not because they were powerful or mighty. But because of who Christ is and what he has done, and still does, for his people.

He's the almighty Son of God, who saved us by his blood. He's present with us in all things, in his Word, in Baptism, and in the Lord's Supper. Nothing can change that. Not even death, as Paul says in Romans 8. That's the ground of faith: that's why faith endures.

Amen.