

“Follow Me”

Mt. 15:21-28

Last week, I mentioned how “God doesn’t love everyone the same.” Not that God loves you more or less than He loves anyone else; however, He does love you differently. We see this with Jesus in Matthew’s Gospel. When He was confronted with the massive crowd who were bringing the sick and dying to Him, He had compassion on them, healed them, and fed them with so much that there were baskets full of bread and fish left over. That is what they needed.

Jesus dealt with Peter with a different kind of love. Peter, as he was out walking on the water failed to realize as he is reaching up and crying out, “Lord, save me,” that Jesus had been saving him all along. And out of His love for Peter, Jesus allowed him to sink a little bit. This is what he needed. And Jesus says to him, “O you of little faith.” It may not have been what he wanted to hear, but God, in His wisdom, knew that this is what he needed.

We can get frustrated with our heavenly Father and question why things are happening to me that don’t seem to be happening to other people. Does He love me less? No, He just loves me differently. He knows when I need

compassion, He knows when I need comfort, He knows when I need to be fed, and He knows when I need to be humbled. Our relationship is very personal. He knows me better than I know myself.

We see more of this in our Gospel reading today. A Canaanite woman from the region of Tyre and Sidon comes out and follows Jesus. She is crying out, “Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David.” This is no small statement from her. This is the kind of plea made in faith that was not being offered too often among the Jews.

And Jesus doesn’t offer a response. The disciples assume Jesus choosing to be silent means He wants nothing to do with her. And then He answers her saying, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.” And she pleads again, “Lord, help me.” And again He answers in words that will not be showing up on evangelism cards in any church anytime soon: “It is not right to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs.”

Ah, this is that “tough love” for her that God knows she needs, right. Once again, this is why we need to read God’s Word within its context. The account of the Canaanite woman is connected with Peter walking on the water. The “tough love” is more for Peter and the Israelites than it is for this woman.

The disciples beg Jesus to send her away because she is “crying out after us” – literally, she is behind us, following us and won’t stop asking for mercy. All throughout Jesus’ ministry (and Matthew’s Gospel in particular) Jesus calls His disciples with the words “Follow Me.” The believers are called “followers” of Christ.

Two weeks from now, in our Gospel reading from Matthew 16, we will hear about when Jesus speaks of dying on the cross and Peter tells Jesus that this should never be, what does Jesus say to him? “Get behind Me, Satan.” The people who oppose Jesus always try to stand before Him. They think they are there to teach. They think they are there to lead.

In our weekly Gospel readings this summer, as we have been going through the Gospel of Matthew, part of the section we just jumped over was Jesus dealing with the Pharisees and other teachers confronting Jesus and telling Him how things really are and what laws everyone has to obey in order to be right with God.

But the reality of salvation in Christ comes from being behind Him. This is the image of the Gospel. The Law of God is rightfully pointing at your sin and saying, “You are guilty. You are deserving of death and hell.” What Jesus has done is to place Himself between you and the wrath of the Law. You stand behind Him.

If you choose to stand in front of Christ so that you can tell Him how things are going to be, or how things should be, He can't shield you from the wrath of the Law. The perfect Law of God demands punishment for breaking the Law. All sin is deserving of death. Jesus chose to suffer that death for you. Jesus chose to stand between you and the sting of death.

When Peter told Jesus that Him dying on the cross should never be, Peter was standing on the wrong side of Jesus. Jesus wanted Peter behind Him because of His love for him.

This Canaanite woman was behind Jesus, following Jesus, asking, begging for mercy, for help. This is what followers expect to receive when we are behind Him. Her daughter was severely possessed by a demon. She was in the clutches of Satan. She needed to get behind Jesus. She needed to be in His protection.

This whole section of Matthew's Gospel begins and ends with feeding miracles among the Israelites with baskets full of bread left over. You have the feeding of the 5000 and the feeding of the 4000. In between those miracles, we hear Jesus say to this woman, "It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." At this point in time, anyone who was not of the house of Israel was not rightly a part of the people of God. This is going to

change. And it is a good thing, because I am not a Jew – and, to my knowledge, none of you are either.

She is not a Jew. But notice, she does not attempt to teach Jesus how God's Word needs to change or how that old way of thinking is outdated. She recognizes the truth of His words, and she again begs for mercy by saying, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table."

She sees that God's mercy is so great that the Jews have basketfuls left over to feed her and her daughter and anyone who follows Jesus. And again we see a parallel to Peter sinking in the water. He cried out, "Lord, save me." She cries out, "Lord, help me." To Peter, Jesus says, "O you of little faith." But hearing her calling out for the crumbs, the leftovers, the church beyond the bloodlines of Abraham pulls from Jesus the reply, "O woman, great is your faith!"

And her daughter was healed instantly. Like He does for all whom He loves, He gives what is needed so that we may follow Him and remain behind Him in His protection. Amen.