

**Reminiscere**  
**16 March 2025**  
**Matthew 15:21-28 (Genesis 32:22-32; 1 Thessalonians 4:1-7)**

**Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David**

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ—Amen

The text for this morning's sermon is the Holy Gospel appointed for today from the Holy Gospel According to St. Matthew, the fifteenth chapter.

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit—Amen

“Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David.” With these words, this woman has said a mouthful.

“Son of David” is a messianic title. Sure, Solomon was David's son, but he was a less-than-complete fulfillment of what the Lord had promised David about his son. And the Psalms and the Prophets are full of references showing that Israel was awaiting the arrival of a greater Son of David, the Messiah who would rule Israel forever with wisdom, justice, and righteousness, who would be their shepherd and feed them. By addressing Him as “Son of David,” this woman professes that she believes that Jesus of Nazareth is the promised Messiah, the greater Son of David, the savior of His people.

She also calls Jesus, “Lord.” In St. Matthew's Gospel, that is the title His disciples—those who have faith that the reign of God has come near in Him—use for Him. It is also the title post-exilic Hebrews used in place of God's proper name, Yahweh. So, by calling Jesus, “Lord,” at the very least, this woman confesses Him to be one who brings the reign of God to earth, and perhaps, she is even confessing Him to be Yahweh, God in the flesh, Immanuel, God with us.

Before she calls Him, “Lord,” before she calls Him, “Son of David,” she cries out to Jesus, “Have mercy on me.” In addition, to believing that Jesus of Nazareth is the greater Son of David,

Israel's Messiah, in addition to believing that He is God with Us and has brought the reign of Heaven to earth, she believes first that all of that is for the sake of being merciful, and she believes that that mercy is for her.

Now, she is not an Israelite. She is a Canaanite. She is not an heir of God's promise to David. She is descended from Israel's enemies, the ones who possessed the Promised Land when Joshua led Israel in to possess it, the ones God told Joshua to destroy, the ones Joshua and the Israelites did not destroy, the pagans who almost immediately led the Children of Israel away from their God and into the worship of pagan idols. But this woman cries out to Jesus with the faith of a true Israelite.

Where does a foreign pagan come up with such faith? Well, just like the foreign Magi who knew that the peculiar star in the sky meant a king had been born in Israel, we don't know any details. What we do know is what St. Paul tells us: Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God. Somewhere along the line, someone had proclaimed the word of God to this pagan foreigner, and now she believes that Jesus of Nazareth is the Lord, the Son of David, who has come to show mercy to His people.

So, she cries out, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon." And what does she hear from Jesus? Crickets. Not a single word. And what she hears from His disciples is disdain. "Just give her what she wants and send her away; she's annoying us." Jesus wouldn't answer her, but He answers them. "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." Ouch. That answer must have stung. This is the Lord? This is great David's greater Son? This is mercy?

But the woman is undeterred. She gets down on her knees and prays, "Lord, help me." She still believes Jesus is Lord, and she still believes He will be merciful and help her.

This time, Jesus finally answers her: “It is not right to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs.” If His previous answer stung, this one is a crushing blow. Why is Jesus being such a jerk? How can we justify His behavior toward this woman? We can’t. But neither do we have too. Think about it. It is not our job to justify Jesus. He came to justify us. And besides, this woman doesn’t think He needs justifying at all.

In the face of these soul-crushing responses from Jesus, the Canaanite woman doesn’t argue; she doesn’t try to justify herself. She simply gets down on the ground and worships her Lord: “Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.” She doesn’t even seem surprised. When she called Him “Son of David,” she knew. She knew that she was not an heir of David. She knew that she had no right to ask anything of Yahweh, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, David’s Son, and David’s Lord. She knew she was but a Canaanite dog. But just like Jacob at the Jabbok, she would not let Him go until He blessed her. Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. Despite everything her senses were telling her, she clung to what the word of God had brought her to believe about this merciful Lord, the Son of David. Because of the faith the Holy Spirit had created in her through the Word of God, she believed that Jesus’ mercy was so superabundant that even just the crumbs of His mercy would be enough for her and her daughter.

From this foreigner, descended from pagans, we see what the faith of a true Israelite looks like, and we learn what it is to pray with such faith. “And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. What does this mean? We pray in this petition that our Father in heaven would not look at our sins, or deny our prayer because of them. We are neither worthy of the things for which we pray, nor have we deserved them, but we ask that He would give them all to us by grace, for we daily sin much and surely deserve nothing but punishment.” That sounds a whole lot like, “Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.”

We just sang it, but it bears repeating:

When in the hour of deepest need  
 We know not where to look for aid;  
 When days and nights of anxious thought  
 No help or counsel yet have brought,

Then is our comfort this alone  
 That we may meet before Your throne;  
 To You, O faithful God, we cry  
 For rescue in our misery.

For You have promised, Lord, to heed  
 Your children's cries in time of need  
 Through Him whose name alone is great,  
 Our Savior and our advocate.

And so we come, O God, today  
 And all our woes before You lay;  
 For sorely tried, cast down, we stand,  
 Perplexed by fears on ev'ry hand.

O from our sins, Lord, turn Your face;  
 Absolve us through Your boundless grace.  
 Be with us in our anguish still;  
 Free us at last from ev'ry ill.

So we with all our hearts each day  
 To You our glad thanksgiving pay,  
 Then walk obedient to Your Word,  
 And now and ever praise You, Lord.

You and I have a distinct advantage over the Canaanite woman. We have seen the fulfillment of the mercy of the Lord, the Son of David. When we heard the word of God, it included the cross. It included Christ crucified for our sins and raised for our justification. We have no reason to doubt that Jesus is, in fact, merciful to us because the crucifix is a constant reminder of His great mercy to us.

“When in the hour of deepest need,” that is, when it seems like Jesus is ignoring us, or worse yet, when it seems like Jesus is telling us that He is not for us, when we look at all the

circumstances of our life and it appears as though Jesus has abandoned us, we remember this Canaanite's confession, and we make it our own. We live by faith and not by sight. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God. And the word of God holds Christ crucified before your eyes. You may be a dog, but Jesus died and rose for you. If God seems at times to be silent (Now, mind you, He never *is* silent. Jesus is always present in His Word and Sacrament—the way you feel doesn't change this, He always keeps His promise)—but if He seems to be ignoring your need—He is only driving you closer to Him, driving away any thought that may arise in you that you have any merit or claim on Him except that of a begging dog. If Jesus allows you at times only to hear and feel the knife edge of His Law, rejoice that He has come to you and speaks to you in His Word at all, and know that what is being cleaved from your heart and mind are things which only hurt you more. What you see, what you experience, what you feel, all can and do lie to you. But the Word of Christ does not lie. So, know that like the Canaanite woman, you will soon, so very soon, be returned to your God and Savior's grace and hear anew the refreshing, healing word of His Grace and favor, abundant beyond all expectation, measure, or reason.

God is good, and He is gracious to sinners. Cling to Him through no claim of your own, but because of His mercy and favor. He forgives you every sin. He heals you of death and hell. You are dogs no more, but are His beloved children, and He places you at His table, and feeds you with the Word and Bread and Water of Life, now and forevermore. In Christ, at your Father's table, you are forgiven for all your sins.

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit—Amen

The peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus—  
Amen