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Peace, Sun Prairie
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Pentecost 13
Matthew 15:21-28

DON'T LET GO OF THE "YES"

I wonder what nights were like for that mother, the Canaanite woman. Matthew 15 says her daughter was being severely tormented by a demon. Did she sleep? Could she ever sleep? Did her daughter thrash around? Did she cry out? If this mother went to sleep would her daughter tear up the house or hurt herself? Would she run out into the street and be trampled by horses and wagons or get lost or be molested by some creep in the darkness? Did the mother have any help, anyone else who could take over now and then so she could have a moment's respite?

Christian parents, what horrific things have you had to contemplate, pray about or helplessly anguish over while lying awake in the darkness of your bedroom? I'm sure we each have our own nightmarish scenarios. You've sat next to your little one through the night as she was burning with fever or vomiting. Perhaps from their teen or college years we have stories harrowing enough as to compare with the horror of one's daughter being possessed by a demon. Perhaps we have even wondered, "What possessed them?" You know the drained feeling the next day. With what desperate exhaustion did the Canaanite mother seek after Jesus?

If there were ever a sign that would seem to indicate you have been abandoned by God, would it not be that your child is possessed by a demon? But what if you would go to the Savior, the Son of God, for help and He would ignore you? What if adding insult to injury he insinuates that you have the status of a dog? Would that not confirm to you that you most surely have been abandoned by God?

What would you do? Would you give up? Would you despair?

Would you agree with Him?

Listen again to Matthew 15: *A Canaanite woman from that territory came and kept crying out, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David! A demon is severely tormenting my daughter!" But he did not answer her a word. His disciples came and pleaded, "Send her away, because she keeps crying out after us." He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." But she came and knelt in front of him, saying, "Lord, help me." He answered her, "It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to their little dogs." Yes, Lord, she said, "yet their little dogs also eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table."*

Interestingly, by chance I googled this Scripture reading and came across blogs by religious social justice warriors. They were angry at Jesus for His treatment of this woman. They called Him bigoted and intolerant. They said that here Jesus set the tone for the way the Church has always treated people who are different.

Those bloggers are missing it entirely. They are speaking from blind human unbelief. But the point of this encounter between the Canaanite woman and Jesus is faith and can only be understood from faith. Here's the lesson Jesus wants us to learn from this encounter: Don't let go of the "Yes." Faith clings to the "Yes."

2 Corinthians 1 says: *No matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ.* Think of that. If God has made a promise, any promise, in connection with Jesus He will never say no to that promise. It is Jesus who died cross to atone for our sins. It is in Jesus we find God's forgiveness and mercy. God will always say yes for Jesus' sake. Maybe it doesn't look or feel that way. But always look to Jesus and don't let go of the "Yes."

Humanly speaking, the Canaanite woman had no right to expect help from a Jewish Savior. But she would not let go of the “Yes.” She knew about Jesus, for He was widely known. In fact, the very next verses of Matthew right after this episode tell us: *Large crowds came to Jesus bringing with them the lame, the blind, the crippled, those unable to speak, and many others. They put them down at his feet, and he healed them.* That was the Jesus she knew because He was always doing such things. He was always saying, “Yes.” Therefore she refused to accept that He was being consistent with Himself when He seemed to turn His back on her. “This is not the Jesus I have learned of, the Jesus who invites us, ‘Come to me all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest.’ Jesus, I refuse to accept that you will not help me. “Yes” must be your answer. I will not let go of the “Yes.”

But why would Jesus behave this way toward her? Why the delay? Why the gruffness? Why the cold shoulder? My dear fellow believers, it is not because Jesus is unloving or unmerciful. It is because He *did* love this woman -enough to lay down his life for her. Because He loved her and knew precisely what she needed He wanted to strengthen and confirm her faith in Him even more. You see, God often behaves in this manner with us. He plays like He is not hearing us, like our words are falling on deaf ears. He seems to let things go on indefinitely. He also permits satan to torture us with mind games: “You have no right. Your child is wayward. Your family is a disaster. You have been a disaster of a dad or a mom. It’s evident God has abandoned you. Other people are good parents with nice families. God is obviously with them. But there is no help from God for you.”

God makes us go through such ongoing hellish experiences only to drive faith deeper into our hearts and to steel our resolve not to let go of the “Yes.” Your muscles never grow stronger if you only lay around and relax them. They need exertion. In the same way, your faith is exerted through torment so that it grows stronger. The result will be an even more amazing salvation. For God most certainly does say, “Yes.”

This reading from Matthew 15 teaches us then about faith and prayer – for they are essentially the same. Faith looks to Jesus for every need. Prayer looks to Jesus for every need. It teaches us how not to let go of the “Yes.” Dear Jesus, call me a great sinner if you will, I can only agree with you. Rebuke me as the worst parent ever. Tell me I have no right. Call me a dog if you will. I will not argue. For that is what I am. But I can’t bother with that right now since you have atoned for my sins. No, right now I am in desperate need and you cannot put me off. Not forever. For that is not who you are. You are the friend of sinners. You love children. You love my child, even more than I do. My child is your child because he was baptized. You gladly helped many other parents: the Canaanite woman, Jairus and his daughter, the widow from Nain and her son, the man whose boy suffered seizures. You gathered up children in your arms when mothers brought them to you.

And would you refuse to help me and my child even if he is an adult child? No you would not. For that is not who you are. You are the Jesus who promised the no one can pluck us from your hand. You are the Jesus who promised that with God all things are possible. No one forced these promises out of you. You offered them. They were your idea. And therefore you have to make good on them because that is who you are and you do not lie. Your Word says that every promise you have made is a yes. So I don’t care that it looks and feels like I’ve been totally abandoned. I won’t let go of the “Yes.”

I’ll be a dog, dear Jesus. Just give me a crumb. I’ll be happy with a crumb... because I know that a single crumb from you will be greater and more awesome than everything on this entire planet combined. I refuse to let go of the “Yes.”

You can almost picture Jesus startling the Canaanite woman, as though suddenly spinning around and nearly knocking her over with a bear hug, when He exclaims: *“Woman, your faith is great! It will be done for you, just as you desire.”* And her daughter was healed at that very hour. At that moment the woman’s faith proved correct. The answer was yes! And she was not a dog but a daughter of the King.

2 Corinthians 1: *No matter how many promises God has made, they are “Yes” in Christ.* Dear Christians, don’t let go of the “Yes.”