

Genesis 45:1-15

Ps133

Romans 11:13-32

Matthew 15:21-28

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Today's reading from Matthew's Gospel must be read with care. We need to listen to the voices, to hear who is talking to fully understand, otherwise we could hear Jesus' message as one of harshness as she addresses the Canaanite woman.

So, what do we hear? The woman immediately recognises Jesus. She knows him not just as a miracle worker who can heal her demon-possessed daughter but the Son of David. She knows that Jesus is of God. Her first statement recognizing the Son of David is a statement of trust and of faith. We next hear the disciples. They don't recognise the woman as somebody who should receive the blessings of Jesus. Their voice is heard speaking to Jesus – "send her away, she is annoying us." Then we hear Jesus talk to the disciples with words that affirm his ministry, he has been sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. If we are not listening closely to the action, we could make a judgement that Jesus has not come to grant the request of the woman and the next part of the dialogue seems to affirm that, but does it really?

The interaction between Jesus and the woman can confuse us. The words don't seem to be words that Jesus would speak, particularly when he seems to call

the woman a harsh name. This interaction makes us sit up and listen to Jesus. Jesus is not saying that he will not feed the dogs. Jesus words are almost a parable, a mini scene, of what will happen in his life, through his death and his resurrection. The scene that Jesus gives us is the meal table, and Jesus is affirming his purpose through that parable scene. The family will be fed first. The members of the household will be fed first – the master, the adults, the children. Jesus is not saying anything that would go against the traditions. It is the word that we translate to “dogs” that causes some concern. The dogs that Matthew refers to (and Mark as well in Mk 7:27) are small dogs, pet dogs, that live in the house, not the wild dogs of the street. Jesus reminds the woman in this small sub-scene that **all** will be fed in order. The pets will not be neglected, but those who had been waiting and hoping for the Messiah would know that their hope is not in vain and He “the Son of David” who the woman affirms he is, is the Messiah. Jesus is telling the woman, and the disciples who want to send her away, that all who are faithful will be fed, and they won’t be fed scraps.

These words of Matthew need to be read carefully, but our reaction to them, and our application of them, needs to be careful as well.

The woman was persistent, and why shouldn’t she be, she knows who Jesus is. She knows that through him her daughter can be made well. She knows that Jesus is the key to the salvation of her daughter. She begs for the mercy of Jesus and receives it through faith. She trusts Jesus, she asks Jesus, and is rewarded for that trust.

The disciples don't get away easily! They were quick to judge the woman. They didn't want her near Jesus because she was annoying them; but Jesus taught them, and he teaches us, through this interaction. The words that Jesus speaks to the disciples "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel," may have seemed to be a final judgement about the woman. The disciples may have concluded, and we may have concluded the same as we listened today, that Jesus was not going to have anything to do with the woman and her pleas. They may have heard that she was not one of the "lost sheep," but Jesus actions taught the disciples that they really don't know the Canaanite woman like he does, and his actions teach us as well. Their judgement was not His judgement. The woman was worthy to receive the grace that He came to bring through His death and resurrection. The disciples judged the woman as unworthy, and she **was** worthy. Do we do that ourselves? Do we judge others as being not worthy of the promises of God without fully realising what we are doing? Jesus' judgement was that the woman, through her faith and trust and possibly through her persistence, was worthy of the grace that He had come to deliver. In this scene, in Matthew's gospel, we see, again, the promises of God fulfilled through Jesus, God the Son.

So, what do we hear and see through Matthew today? We see the promises of God revealed. The woman was faithful, she declares Jesus as the Son of David, which is a statement of faith recognising who Jesus is. Jesus gives salvation freely to the daughter of the woman. Notice that there was no promise made by the woman. There is no "if you heal my daughter I will...promise to follow..." there is none of that. The woman already trusted Jesus, even when the

disciples tried to get rid of her, she still trusted Jesus. The salvation was given through faith alone, not because of some promise made by the woman.

We see the disciples taught not to judge those around them and we can place the same lesson on ourselves, but there is something greater that the disciples see. They saw salvation come to the whole family of God. The promise of salvation was for all and all would be fed. Jesus judged the woman as faithful because she was. She didn't make a promise to him, He revealed the promise of God through her. That is what the disciples saw and heard and that is what we see and hear as well. Someone seemingly unworthy was completely worthy through faith in Christ.

We take that away with us. The person who made the woman worthy was Jesus. She knew who he was, and she was given salvation through the healing of her daughter through that trust and faith alone. Amen.