

GRACE



THE POWER TO
CHANGE DEAD ENDS
INTO NEW BEGINNINGS

August 16, 2020

Introduction

Invitation

Call to Worship:

God's grace is far more abundant and amazing than we could ever imagine. Today, we worship together, connected as brothers and sisters in Christ, and blessed by the grace of God that accepts, loves, forgives, and nurtures us. Thanks be to God! Let us worship!

Hymn: "Grace Alone"

Reading the Word: Matthew 15:21-28

Message: "By the Grace of God"

Rev. Dr. Deb Hanson

Prayer:

O God, at times we forget that your grace is big and wide and deep enough to include everyone. And there are times when we forget to offer your grace to others. Forgive us when we fail to see someone else as your beloved child. Forgive us when we pass judgment on them because they are different from us. Forgive us for unkind thoughts and actions, or for the ambivalence that keeps us from standing up for them and with them. Send us forth with renewed determination to treat others with respect and acceptance. Thank you for the assurance of your grace in our lives. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed by Thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

Hymn: "Amazing Grace"

Blessing

Matthew 15:21-28

The Canaanite Woman's Faith

Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon." But he did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, "Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us." He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me." He answered, "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." Then Jesus answered her, "Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish." And her daughter was healed instantly.





**SERMON TRANSCRIPT
GIVEN BY
Rev. Dr. Deb Hanson**

Message “By the Grace of God”

Rev. Dr. Debra Hanson

Have you ever experienced not fitting in? What were the circumstances? How did you feel? What did you do?

In today’s scripture lesson, Jesus entered a gentile region of Tyre and Sidon. This was an area where a number of people who were descendants of the Canaanites lived. When Israel entered the promised land, they had to conquer Canaan in order to live there, and they succeeded, but the defeated Canaanites became bitter enemies. Of course, that happened many years earlier, and the term “Canaanite” eventually disappeared. In the gospel of Mark, we find the term “Syrophenician woman,” which was apparently more current for Jesus’ day. However, the writer of Matthew uses “Canaanite” to make a point about how outcast this woman really would have been in relation to Jesus and his disciples.

Commentator John Petty writes, “Matthew deliberately resurrects that word in order to underline the outsider status of the woman—not only is she a woman, not only a foreigner, not only unclean but an ancient enemy besides!”* In addition, she is a Gentile, another strike against her. Bloodlines were very important in Jesus’ day, and this woman had just about nothing that would connect her to Jesus and everything that a good Jewish man would reject and ignore. And it appears that Jesus does just that, at least at the beginning of the story.

The disciples wanted him to send her away because she kept shouting at him, asking him to pay attention to her, to listen to her plea. Jesus appeared to act as if he didn’t hear her, but as she persisted, he turned to her and insulted her by saying that he had come only for the house of Israel and that it wasn’t right to give their food to the dogs.

This has always been shocking to me. Did Jesus call her a dog? In Jesus’ day, dogs were not considered pets, but pests! According to the disciples, this woman definitely was a pest. However, she was also persistent in asking for mercy from Jesus. She only wanted her daughter to be healed. Somehow, she broke through to Jesus, reaches his heart, opens his mind to recognize that she has faith that is even more powerful than the disciples. For most of Jesus’ ministry, they floundered around trying to figure out who Jesus was, and this Canaanite woman immediately saw him as the Son of God and believed.

Jesus healed her daughter and commended her for her great faith. As Peter Woods writes: “At last here is someone who gets it! The wrong person, of the wrong culture, in the wrong place, speaking with the wrong accent. It should be all wrong but don’t you know, it’s actually all right.”** This woman understood that Jesus was the Son of God and was not just for the nation of Israel, but for the entire world. We have numerous instances where Jesus ministered to Gentiles, those who were outcasts and marginalized as his ministry continued and expanded to include many others.

Today we are faced with many ways in which people are not accepted or treated badly because of their culture, the color of their skin, their gender, how old they are, their sexual orientation, for their religious practices, and a number of other behaviors that judge, reject and ostracize them. How do we, as a church, open our minds and hearts to welcome those who deal with this in their lives? How do we stand with them?

Here are a few thoughts from the many anti-racism workshops I have attended:

- * Listen to others who are experiencing oppression.
- * Learn from them.
- * Stand with them in the struggle in whatever way possible.
- * Speak out when we hear abusive language, bullying, bad jokes, or derogatory language.
- * Support organizations that promote equal treatment and justice.

Those are just a few things we can do. At the top of the list, we would add prayer. Pray for the oppressed; pray for our own complicity; pray for justice; and pray for our nation and world. We can make a difference by not being ambivalent or apathetic. We can change attitudes beginning with our own learning about what to do to support and advocate for our brothers and sisters who are going through these challenges. May we “walk a mile in their shoes” to try to understand and then walk right along with them on the journey.

The Canaanite woman teaches us that speaking out makes a difference. She teaches us about persistence, and she teaches us about faith that doesn’t falter. May we learn from her, and may we, as the Church, become agents for change, justice, equality, acceptance, and sharing God’s love with all. Amen.

*Found at Text This Week under commentaries for this scripture passage.

**Text This Week under the commentaries for today’s passage.