

25 The woman came and knelt before him. “Lord, help me!” she said. 26 He replied, “It is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to the dogs.” 27 “Yes it is, Lord,” she said. “Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master’s table.” 28 Then Jesus said to her, “Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted.” And her daughter was healed at that moment.

For over ten years, time worked differently in the Soviet Union. In 1929, Joseph Stalin introduced a new calendar, concept, and work week called *nepreryvka*. It means “continuous working week.” Seeing that his country was falling behind in productivity and modernization to the West, Stalin tried to make up the ground by restructuring the working masses. Instead of 5 days of work and two days off for the weekend, there would 7 hours of work for four days and one day off, gaining more work days over time.

This worked because 20% of the population would be assigned a color for one of the five days. That was the day you had off. So this meant that 80% of the workforce would be active on any given day of the year. The factories never had to shut down, the mines were never quiet, and the refineries were never not producing. Naturally, something interesting happened. People started to form new groups based on, you guessed it, your assigned work color. The yellow group became friends with the yellow, green with green, and red with red because you were all off on the same day. Everyone else was kind of ‘other.’

In our text for this week, one of the individuals in the story is definitely seen as an ‘other.’ And these are deliberately described as the point of Jesus’ interaction will show. As Jesus withdraws from Galilee, someone very different from his crew comes to meet him. All of them are significant. One this is a woman. This was when the gender lines were much more demarcated; women usually tended to associate with women and were, by many, less important than men. She is from a different country geographically; she’s from the region of Tyre and Sidon. A region that was lamented as wicked in the Old Testament. But most importantly, she’s a Canaanite. One of Israel’s oldest and most consistent enemies: politically, culturally, and religiously. She’s a gentile woman of Canaanite descent.

And this woman needs some help. She comes to Jesus because she has a daughter with a problem she cannot fix. She is demon-possessed. She is badly possessed and is “suffering terribly.”

And Jesus’ interaction with this woman in desperate need of help is puzzling at first. She comes out, screaming to the son of David for help, and then, first of all, Jesus ignores her. She is persistent and keeps going, but then Jesus responds, saying, **“I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.”** And a third time, Jesus even goes so far as to say, **“It is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to the dogs.”** If done by one of your pastors, this behavior would have you questioning our fitness for ministry.

But Jesus, with these responses, he’s doing two things: he is bringing to light the tremendous faith of this woman, and he is also teaching his disciples a lesson through this woman because you see, whether overtly or privately, the disciples had seen this woman as someone other. When

Jesus ignores this woman, the disciples don't come in and try to convince Jesus to help. They also were telling Jesus to send this woman away, frankly, she is annoying us with her crying out, and she doesn't deserve to be spoken to.

And this is what happens when you draw lines of separation between groups. In nepryrvka, it was a deliberate attempt to remove focus from what united them, fellow people of the working class, to something else, your work color, to keep people from rising up.

This lesson from Jesus cuts through Earth's idea of the 'other' people. Yes, she is a woman; yes, she is from Tyre and Sidon; yes, she is a Canaanite. But what is it that is most important? What is it that unites them, not separates them? A deep need for the grace and the forgiveness of God, something only God can give. Jesus even says in this woman's presence, "I was sent only to the **lost** sheep of Israel." The people of Israel are lost too.

What is praised in this woman is not her heritage. It is not her economic status. It is not her function in society; no, it is her faith. Her understanding that she deserves nothing, but God's grace is given regardless. The only time in the Gospel of Matthew where someone's faith is qualified as great. Great faith from someone so different.

Whether we think about it or not, we all look at those people that are unlike us and draw lines of separation. We can look at them and think they are too other, either too hard to reach, not receptive enough, or perhaps even not deserving of God's grace. The woman in the nursing home is too old. Thinking the same way for too long. No point in bringing Jesus. They are too young. The world and the culture around them, too influences them. There's nothing that can grow faith there. They are currently struggling with alcoholism and some drug problems. I don't know if having someone like that around is worth it.

What an absolutely grievous sin that creeps into each of us to somehow think that because of who we are, we are somehow superior to someone else, any less needful for God's grace and forgiveness, any less lost than anyone else in this world. Somehow less lost than someone of a different race, gender, country of origin, age, or activity.

The antidote for division comes from the understanding of the grace of God that has been accomplished in all of us. Getting rid of what is not essential and getting to what Jesus came here to do. And it takes the form of a pointed question. Why is it that you are in church today? You didn't come to church because everyone here looks like you. You didn't come to church because the people here are all interested in the same things you are. You didn't come to church because you come from the same place. You come to church because you desperately need to hear the word of God. You come to church because you realize you are a dog, too, that desperately needs to be fed the bread of life. You come to church because you have a problem only God can fix.

You come to church because it is here that you hear about your Savior Jesus, who has taken away all of your sins and grievous and shameful faults, and you stand and his child before his very throne. You come to church because it is here that you are fed in word, and sacrament in your faith is strengthened. You don't come to church for any other reason. You come to church

because it isn't about you. It's about God and his people. It's about sin and grace. It's about damnation and salvation. It's about problems that God and only God can fix.

That is what the Canaanite woman understood. She understood that she, just like everybody else, is undeserving of God's grace and forgiveness, but undeserving as she was, God gives mercy to his people. Whoever they may be. All people are undeserving the bread from his table, but he gives it all.

This is the universality of grace. Is that all of those divisions that might seem significant to us are not essential to God what God cares about our sinners coming to his table, where he, from the depths of his love, gives them the forgiveness of sins where people from every tribe, nation, and race, economic status, and background All receive from empty hands That is what God offers that is what God gives. God's grace has never been reserved for one kind of people and desperately wants to be given to all.

My brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus in this world, it's effortless to look at the things that separate you from others. God calls us not to look at those differences but to look at what unites us. What unites us is this: poor sinners as we are Jesus Christ died for us. Whatever our background, Jesus came to save us. Whoever you may be, Jesus loves you and gives salvation to you.