

**Sermon for August 17<sup>th</sup>, 2014**

**Tenth Sunday of Pentecost, Matthew 15:21-28**

BLESSINGS TO YOU AND PEACE FROM GOD THE FATHER, OUR  
LORD JESUS CHRIST, AND THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

Last Sunday, after Ardyce's memorial service, I was talking to **Mike**, one of her son in laws. He was **thanking** me and **everyone** at Eden for **all** they had done to make it a wonderful service. He also commented on the hospitality, the warmth, and the openness of the congregation. He told me that this kind of willingness to be there for them was something that he had not experienced in **too** many churches before. He said, "*Generally what I have found is that churches are pretty closed in and they make those who are not a part of the congregation feel as though they are outsiders.*" He said, '*He did not feel that at Eden and for that he and the family were very grateful.*'

Just what is it about hospitality and being open to the other that **helps** us here at Eden be the welcoming congregation for which we have become known? (Pause) At our council meeting on Weds. night I took the devotion for the evening from this book. It is called, "*Radical Hospitality*". Here is a portion from the chapter called, "*hospitality begins inside*". (Read from page 38.)

**Hospitality**—it is welcoming the other, it is being open to the outsider, and it is helping someone in time of need with **no regard** for race, creed, or color.

In our **first** reading this morning from the book of Isaiah we heard of hospitality given to foreigners. It is said that if these *'foreigners'* **joined** themselves to the Lord, if they **ministered** to him, if they **loved** in the name of the Lord, if they were His **servants**, if they **kept** the Sabbath, and if they held to God's **covenant** they would be able to go to God's holy mountain, they would be **joyful** in the house of prayer, their offerings would be accepted on the altar, and God's house would be called a house of prayer for all peoples. The *'outcasts'* of Israel would be gathered with those who were already gathered. What a **blessing** for the people who had up until that time been considered *'foreigners'* or *'outcasts'*. The Lord's grace, salvation, and deliverance would be **revealed** and **reign** down upon them. **OH HAPPY DAY!!**

But **was it** such a happy day or a day of the same kind of hospitality **revealed** and **reigned** down upon the *'foreigner'*, the *'outcast'* in the gospel reading for this morning? In **this** reading we hear of a Jesus who, I do not know about you, is quite frankly **not** a Jesus I feel too warm and cozy about. This does **not sound** like the same Jesus who healed the sick, who blessed the little children, who forgave the adulterous woman, or the Jesus who told the parables revealing God's glory.

Today we hear of a different kind of Jesus. A Jesus who **ignored** a woman's cry for help, a Jesus who **addressed** his disciples in her presence as though she

were not even there, and a Jesus who **insulted her** by referring to her and her race as ‘dogs’.

First, let us get some of the **back story** to understand this reading a bit further. Jesus was nearing the end of his public ministry; he felt the need for solitude and went away to the coastal districts of Tyre and Sidon which were **Gentile areas** where, at that time, the boundaries of God’s mercy were being tested. The Cannonite woman from our reading belonged to a race that had previously occupied Israel. She was part of **a race** that, according to the Jews, was considered ritually unclean and outcasts. This woman **knew** she did not deserve help. She was **only a woman** after all—lowest on the gender totem pole, she was a pagan and a Gentile, **but she still needed help**. She knew no boundaries of culture, race, class or religion.

Yet; this Cannonite woman **knew exactly** who Jesus was. She started shouting, *‘Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon.’* No answer by Jesus. **No compassion** for a child with a demon?? The disciples wanted to send her away. She is bothering us. Jesus response is one that is less than inclusive or hospitable—*“I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”* **Hmmm—only came to save the Jews?**

Here is where a mother’s faith and persistence on behalf of her child come into play. She came and knelt before him—as one who comes in prayer—and she

says nearly the same 3 words that Peter said to Jesus in our reading from last week when he began to sink into the water. *‘Lord, help me.’* This is the first time Jesus **even** acknowledges her by saying, *“It is not fair to take the children (the people of Israel’s) food and throw it to the dogs (to the pagans and the Gentiles.)”* Her **faithful response**, *“Yes, Lord (the 2<sup>nd</sup> time she called him Lord), yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master’s table.”*

**There you have it!!** Faith and persistence know no boundaries. There are a **number** of places in Matthew’s gospel where Jesus chastises his disciples for having ‘little faith’—even as **recently** as in last week’s reading. But **here**, in the **only occurrence** of these two words together in the whole New Testament, Jesus praises the *‘great faith’* of this woman and **commands** that her plea be granted. Her daughter was healed instantly.

**Also**, did you notice that during the course of this reading this **bold** Cannonite woman went from the ranks of not even being noticed or responded to by Jesus to being acknowledged as *‘woman’*. This is the same word Jesus used for his own mother while he was on the cross. The Cannonite woman went from nothing in Jesus’ eyes to something in the eyes of our gracious God.

Faith is a might force. But this story **also** invites us into live inside the tension, living inside the story of *‘foreigner’* or *‘outsider’*, and how we deal with being there for those who are outside of our own sphere of faith and belief. As the

tension builds in this story the **circle of exclusion** tightens. When at last the circle is broken and Jesus steps outside of the **constricting lines** we feel the grace of God coming to light. God's grace has come to one who at the **beginning** of this story was outside the ring of inclusion.

Hospitality, grace, and openness given through the gift of God's mercy to one such as the **Cannonite** woman, '*a foreigner*', '*an outsider*', and yet; one of **great faith**. This is a difficult passage in which we are called to **expand our own hearts** to take in the Good News of the great grace of God in a **new and powerful** way. To expand the opening of our hearts to the hospitality of the other, to experience the truth that God's love **cannot be contained** by our human boundaries. *The blessings of God are for one and for all.* **AMEN.**