

Lent II

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[0 : 00] One of the greatest insults that could be hurled at someone today is calling them a Nazi. Such language conjures up visions of violent behavior, deep hatred, and complete ruthlessness.

But I don't think it's too much of a stretch to say that the Canaanites were viewed by the Israelites in a similar way as one today views the Nazis.

Canaanites were thought of as ruthless pagans who practiced various rituals that involved fertility cults and even child sacrifice, something completely repugnant to the Lord and absolutely condemned by the Word of God.

As the Canaanites were driven out of the Promised Land, they migrated in various regions around Mesopotamia, which included the land of the Phoenicians and Tyre and Sidon.

And this is the geographical area that is mentioned here in our Gospel text of Matthew chapter 15. As Jesus is making his way towards Tyre and Sidon, he hears the cry of a Canaanite woman.

[1 : 32] This Canaanite woman pleads, Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David. She then says, My daughter is severely demon-possessed.

Now, our Lord does not initially respond to this lady. Why? Well, if we would go back and read five chapters earlier, in Matthew chapter 10, As our Lord is sending out his twelve disciples, he told them first to go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

But now here in Matthew chapter 15, this Canaanite woman, this bitter enemy, this one that was hated by the people of Israel, is pleading for help.

The disciples are pretty outraged by this persistent Canaanite woman. They beg our Lord to send this woman away.

And Jesus says to the woman that his mission is to gather the lost sheep of Israel. But this woman does not quit. She continues to beg, and she asks him, Lord, help me.

[2 : 58] Our Lord then responds by saying that it's not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs. But this woman responds by saying, Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table.

Now, some might be offended by our Lord's words, calling this Canaanite woman, or at least making some reference to her, as a little dog.

But what he's really doing is remarking on the fact that, again, he came to Israel. He came to his own. And that this Canaanite woman was considered an outcast, a blasphemer, and she was considered unclean.

That is, like a dog by the Jewish people. But notice, this woman does not seem offended. She doesn't seem taken back by our Lord's words in the very least.

She is content, she says, with our Lord's table scraps. She's not looking for any special privilege or treatment.

[4 : 21] She is content with whatever our Lord will give her, providing her help. And that's why Jesus then says, Oh woman, great is your faith.

Let it be to you as you desire. And then our Lord killed this woman's daughter. So what can we learn from this interaction between Jesus and this Canaanite woman?

Well first, this woman refers to Jesus as Lord. And she does so on three different occasions here in our gospel text of Matthew chapter 15.

Although a Canaanite, this woman demonstrates what true allegiance to Christ really involves. She confesses him as Lord, insinuating that she is not.

She confesses Jesus as Lord, the very first creed of the church and it is the proper response for all who believe. The second thing we can learn from this woman is that faith is not passive.

[5 : 43] This woman is persistent. She is persistent and she continues to beg for mercy. Likewise, we are to be persistent in crying out, Lord have mercy upon us.

Our attitude is to be one of faith, trusting that God will hear us on account of Christ and that his love will be shown to us. We should come to our God with an active and persistent faith.

And the third thing we can learn from this Canaanite woman is to come to Christ in humility. As our collect says this morning, we have no power of ourselves to help ourselves.

It's once we feel that we are powerless, that we are ready to confess Christ as Lord in faith, and that's exactly what this woman did. But as long as we're full of pride, we'll never bow the knee.

We are to be dependent upon God and that attitude of dependence instills in our hearts a deep sense of humility.

[7 : 11] As we say together in the prayer of humble access, we are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under thy table, but thou art the same Lord whose property is always to have mercy.

Beloved, we are to be people who come to God with grateful hearts, receiving his grace, which he gives in abundance. You see, we don't receive table scraps.

we receive the very body and blood of Jesus that provides healing and eternal life.

And again, the opposite of such humility is presumption. It's pride. And this attitude of entitlement, that became the downfall of many in Israel.

we need to take heed to this danger. As baptized Christians, we are to be people of humility, not people ruled by a sense of entitlement.

[8 : 23] But this attitude of humility should manifest itself not only in our relationship to God and humbly bowing before him, it should reach out to others as well.

We are not to look down upon others. We are not to treat people as second-class citizens, no matter what their background or past is.

we are to be people that cry out for mercy and then extend that mercy to others, to our neighbors.

And we do this only as we imitate this Canaanite woman, this woman who confessed Jesus as Lord, crying out to him with a persistent faith and approaching him with deep humility and gratitude. Amen. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.