

## Message Transcript

16<sup>th</sup> August 2020

### *Tenacious faith that will not be ignored*

Genesis 45:1-15 | Psalm 133 | Romans 11:13-32 | Matthew 15:21-28

**"Dear woman," Jesus said to her, "your faith is great. Your request is granted."**

Matthew 15:21-28

#### **Slide 1 is the Message Title**

As I looked at today's Gospel passage, it reminded me of an episode of *The West Wing*, an American political series. It is election season and the press had caught wind that the President doesn't like green beans. CJ, the Press Secretary, goes on a hunt to find out how the press found out. She finally discovers it was Charlie, the President's aid, who made the comment. One little comment caused a frenzy of political drama - the bean growers were angry, the entire state of Oregon was offended ... all because the President didn't like green beans.

In today's passage, we have a situation where Jesus said something and we all feel like saying, "did Jesus just say, what I think he said?"

One little snippet of conversation, one little line of dialogue, attracts a storm of controversy.

The feminists get upset thinking Jesus made a sexist comment. The Canaanites get upset thinking Jesus made a racial slur.

Yes, today we come to that problematic passage, when Jesus' attempt to dodge the crowds is thwarted by a tenacious woman who is desperate to be helped.

Have you ever wondered why Jesus seemingly dismissed this lady's desperate cries?

Was it because Jesus was tired and worn out?

Even though the disciples tell Jesus to send her away, this disregarded lady does not leave in defeat, nor does she allow herself to be ignored.

In what can only be described as an extraordinary turn of events, this determined mother is able to use Jesus' supposedly insulting comment into one of the most profound pieces of dialogue in the Gospels.

And that's not all. The tenacity of this unnamed Canaanite mother prompts Jesus to make a comment he has only said once before – she becomes the second person in the Gospels to astonish Jesus with a demonstration of 'great faith'.

#### **Slide 2 | Jesus is interrupted when he desires a rest from his ministerial responsibilities**

The passage opens with Jesus plan to withdraw from the crowds. He has just had an argument with the Pharisees about what is clean and unclean and had to further explain the concept to his disciples.

Then he left the Jewish region of Galilee, heading north to the region of Tyre and Sidon (v21).

If you and I were to look at a map we would see where Jesus was heading, and we might think that he was going for a short coastal holiday. The perfect place to hide for a few days, where no one was supposed to know where to find him (Mark 7:24).

But, actually, the regions of Tyre and Sidon were not known as a favourite holiday destination, they were Gentile country. No Jew would ever stroll into Gentile country. But Jesus went there to hide – because in Gentile country he had no responsibility nor was there any expectation placed upon him to minister to the locals.

Sometimes the way the Gospel writers described Jesus itinerate ministry, we get the feeling that Jesus responded to every human need, whoever they were, as soon as they asked.

Today's passage corrects this misunderstanding.

### **Slide 3 | The Israelites were called to be a light to the nations – yet their disobedience provoked God to offer salvation to the Gentiles**

From the outset of Jesus' earthly ministry, he knew his mission was first and foremost to the Israelite nation. From the time of Abraham, God had chosen a special group of people, the Israelite nation, to be a blessing (Genesis 12:3) and "a light to the nations" (Isaiah 42:6), a people who brought God's presence, God's holy law, and a picture of God's covenant reign to the world.

God clearly communicated his plan for the Israelites to bring salvation to the world (see John 4:22).

But they repeatedly failed. Rather than being the light God had called them to be, they had copied the idolatrous ways of the surrounding nations, causing God to use powerful rulers to exercise judgement on their rebellion.

By the time Jesus began his earthly ministry, the Israelite nation had become like scattered lost sheep, in captivity to other nations who did not worship God.

The prophet Jeremiah voices God's heartbreak, **"My people have been lost sheep, their shepherds have led them astray. They have lost their way and can't remember how to get back to the sheepfold"** (50:6).

In fact, this is very similar to what Paul has been talking about in his letter to the believers at Rome.

If I can summarise three chapters of his letter (9-11), Paul's heart has been breaking over his Jewish brothers and sisters (9:1). For they rejected their own Messiah (9:30-32).

They were disobedient, yet kept trying to get right with God through keeping the law (9:32). So, God made salvation available to the Gentiles. (Rom 11:11)

And God used the open wide invitation of salvation of the Gentiles to rouse the Jews to jealousy and anger (Rom 10:19), hoping that through their jealousy they may be saved (Romans 11:14).

Remember, the parable Jesus told about the King who planned a great banquet, but all the chosen ones who were invited (the Jews) said they were too busy (keeping the law). (Matthew 22:1-14) So, the King sent out an open invitation to everyone (the Gentiles), and many gladly accepted. Then, at the end of the parable, the King noticed a man wearing the wrong clothes (garments of unrighteousness, representing a Jew trying to achieve righteousness through

keeping the law). What had caused that Jew to finally come to the banquet? Jealousy.) He was suffering from FOMO – Fear of missing out!

Jesus' primary ministry was to call the lost sheep of Israel to recognise him as their promised good Shepherd, the prophets had told them to expect (Isaiah 40:9-11).

Now the title that the persistent mother called Jesus comes into light.

#### **Slide 4 | An unlikely worshipper perceived that Jesus is both Lord of the Jew and the Gentile.**

When she addressed Jesus as **"O Lord, Son of David!"** it shows she knew something of who Jesus was what his mission was all about. Jesus reputation had reached this Gentile country (Mark 3:8, Luke 6:17) and she recognised that Jesus was the expected Messiah, the son of the great King David.

But, even though Jesus knew that she knew who he was ... he pretty much dismissed her, reminding her,

**"I was sent only to help God's lost sheep."**

But, Jesus didn't stop there. Jesus continued using a metaphor that the Canaanite was obviously familiar with.

**"It isn't right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." (v24)**

The 'children' represents God's chosen people, the 'children of the Kingdom' and the 'bread' represents, the blessings, the healing word, the covenant promises of the kingdom of Israel.

The word 'dogs' also has significance.

The exact word Jesus used here, in Greek, means "small dog" or "pet dog." This is a completely different word from the term used to refer to unspiritual people or to an "unclean" animal.

In other words, Jesus is saying, to offer her his authoritative, powerful word, would be like a father taking food from his children to throw it to their pets.

What Jesus seems to be making evident is that this woman had no legitimate expectation of his help. She was outside of the covenant of promise, and there was no requirement for Jesus to grant her what she was asking.

So, Jesus wasn't referring to this woman as a "dog," either directly or indirectly. He wasn't using a rude racial slur but making a point about the priorities He'd been given by God. He was also testing her faith and teaching an important lesson to His disciples.

However, this woman had tenacity.

For without hesitation she responded:

**"That's true, Lord," she said. "But, even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table."**

Wow, that's the kind of fast response that causes you to say to yourself, "did I just say that?"

She understood his metaphor completely.

But she not only understood his metaphor, she saw *within* the metaphor the answer to her problem.

Remember the parable about the banquet? The King who is preparing a feast for his chosen guests?

She is saying *'I see that you are the Son of King David, the promised King, the Saviour who has come into the world to bring salvation and blessing to the nations ...*

*'surely this King is merciful enough to share the blessing with those who do not even deserve to sit at the King's table.'*

Upon hearing her response, I'm sure a huge smile appeared on Jesus' face and he answered,

**"Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted."**

She didn't demand that he follow her into town and come to her house.

She trusted his word. It is exactly like the Roman Officer, the only other person who Jesus commended for their 'great faith'. He too said, "Lord I am not worthy to have you come to my house. Just say the word, and my servant will be healed." (Matthew 8:8)

So, what makes great faith?

Was it just her tenacity? Her perseverance? Her refusal to be ignored?

Was it her quick-witted response? Her ability to say exactly the right thing at the right time?

Or was it something entirely different?

What moved Jesus from indifference, to an exclamation of surprised over 'great faith'?

I believe it was a certain the kind of faith that both the Roman Officer and this Syrophenician woman had uniquely demonstrated.

It is as though they were granted the gift of divine foresight to perceive something about Christ's future kingdom, which had begun, but had yet to come into complete manifestation.

This tenacious Canaanite woman seems to have caught a glimpse of the kingdom Jesus was establishing – a kingdom that was not only for the Jews, but also for the Gentiles.

She recognised that Jesus is the Lord of both the Jew and the Gentile – a multi-ethnic, universal kingdom.

Jesus had been dropping hints of multi-ethnic faith community throughout his teachings (Matthew 8:11, 10:18, John 12:32). Yet even Jesus' disciples, did not really understand God's plan to include the Gentiles until after the resurrection.

We really don't know what little titbit of information gave her this insight.

It may be that she wasn't even aware of what prompted her to make such a timely and prophetic comeback – I can just imagine what she was saying to herself as she walked back home – "Wow where did that come from?"

Yet, I'm sure, it was her ability to discern that Jesus had the authority AND the willingness to bless her, even though she did not deserve it.

This tiny conversation, this inconvenient interruption after a busy, hectic day, led to a beautiful picture of the Saviour's gift of grace for the whole world.

Let us pray that we too will show the same tenacity of faith, believing that our Saviour can offer that same gift of grace to those who have yet to meet our Saviour – those who are very different from us, different race, different gender, different socio economic status ... but nevertheless those who are hungry for the gift of grace that only the Saviour of the world can give.

*Our Lord and Saviour, may we follow the example of this Canaanite woman who would not give up regardless of the difficulties that stood in her way. May we too be persistent in our faith. Lord, let us also learn what Jesus desired his disciples know, that the Kingdom of God is open to all who believe in you as their Lord and Saviour.*

**Amen.**

<b>DAY 6</b>	<b>My Lord answered me!</b>	<b>22<sup>nd</sup> August</b>
<i>In my distress I prayed to the Lord, and the Lord answered me and set me free. The Lord is for me, so I will have no fear. What can mere people do to me? Psalm 118:5-6</i>		Further study: Psalm 118
<p>“ <i>It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in people.</i> ”</p> <p>Psalm 118:8</p>	<p>So many times throughout the Psalms we read of God’s promise to answer our prayers. This is especially important when we are in distress. We need to know that although God may delay answering our prayers, he <b>will</b> answer them – not necessarily with the answer that we want – but definitely with the answer that is for our good.</p>	
	<p>Questions: This week we have focussed on developing tenacious faith. What is one step you can take to strengthen your faith?</p>	
<p><i>Heavenly Father, thank you that you promise to hear my prayers, especially when I am anxious or in distress. Help me to develop persevering faith that does not give up. Amen.</i></p>	<p>Application: What is one prayer request that you are still awaiting God’s answer? Write it in your journal and beside it write – “God is working on this right now!”</p>	



This is a devotional resource created for Southlakes Anglican Church community.

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**Week 4: Lord! Help me grow tenacious faith!**

<b>DAY 1</b>	<b>I celebrate my belonging to you</b>	<b>17<sup>th</sup> August</b>
<i>Let me prosper with the rest of your chosen ones, as they celebrate because they belong to you. Psalm 106:1-24</i>		Further study: Hebrews 12:1-3

“  
*You led your people across land as dry as a desert. You saved them all.*  
”

Psalm 106:9-12

Psalm 106 is known as an intercessory prayer “A Nation Asks for Forgiveness.” The psalmist recalls that although God was faithful and good, his people were disobedient and failed to remember God’s ability to look after them in the desert. When our normal comforts are removed, it can be difficult to remain faithful. Let us pray that God’s Spirit will help us to trust in him, our source of sustenance and security.

Questions: Imagine being in a desert, with no idea where your next meal, or drink will come from. We are going through a strange time at the moment, in what area of your life do you need to place into God’s hands in loving trust.

*Heavenly Father, I am finding it hard to adjust to this new world that is unfolding. Help me to cling to you as my source of security and strength. Amen.*

Application: In your prayer journal, write down what “thrills your heart with all God has done for you.” Then, think of someone who you may like to share one of those stories.

<b>DAY 2</b>	<b>The power of his own word</b>	18 <sup>th</sup> August
<i>By the power of his own word, he healed you and saved you from destruction. Psalm 107:1-20</i>		Further study: Psalm 108
<b>“</b> <i>Has the Lord redeemed you? Then speak out!</i> <b>”</b>	This Psalm is a call for people to remember the goodness of God during difficult times. It recalls when God led his people through the scorching desert (v4), yet in verses 15, 21, 31 the psalmist repeats “You should give praise the Lord for his love and for the wonderful things he has done.” We do need to be constantly recalling God’s blessings in our lives.	
Psalm 107:2	Questions: Read the whole psalm. The repetition of verses 15, 21 and 31 is very intentional. What wonderful things has God done for you?	
<i>Heavenly Father, may I never cease from seeing your blessings in my life. May I constantly bring these to my remembrance. Amen.</i>	Application: In your journal why not start a gratitude page – listing all the times God has done something wonderful in your life.	

<b>DAY 4</b>	<b>Praise and honour to God alone</b>	20 <sup>th</sup> August
<i>Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to your name goes all the glory for your unfailing love and faithfulness. Psalm 114.1</i>		Further study: Psalm 114,115
<b>“</b> <i>All you who fear the Lord, trust in the Lord! He is your helper and your shield.</i> <b>”</b>	Too often we are tempted to trust in our own strength and ingenuity – then we feel really good about ourselves in what we have achieved. Today’s Psalm however, urges us to trust in God’s strength and power alone – and not to place our trust in idols (work of human hands). An idol is something we begin to depend upon more than God.	
Psalm 115:11	Questions: Are there any idols which have crept into your heart? Are you depending on something, hoping it will give you the security and certainty you need?	
<i>Heavenly Father, help me to discern where I have allowed idols to grow in my heart. Help me to never rely on my own strength, but in your strength alone. Amen.</i>	Application: Meditate on the question, “Lord, reveal to me if there is anything in my life that I am trusting, apart from you”.	

<b>DAY 3</b>	<b>God you are truly amazing!</b>	19 <sup>th</sup> August
<i>How amazing are the deeds of the Lord. All who delight in him should ponder them. Psalm 111:1</i>		Further study: Psalm 99
<b>“</b> <i>Shout with joy to the Lord, all the earth! Worship the Lord with gladness. Come before him with singing.</i> <b>”</b>	The psalmist is encouraging us to daily ponder or meditate on the amazing power and deeds God has done. In fact, the first verse says, “I will thank the Lord with all my heart as I meet with is godly people.” That’s why it is terribly important that we share with each other how God is blessing us – we are literally following the instructions of the Word of God. When was the last time you shared with someone the wonderful deeds God has done?	
	Questions: Recall or bring to mind an occasion in the past when God has demonstrated his amazing power? Why not note these down in your prayer journal.	
<i>Heavenly Father, help me to make a commitment to ponder the great moments in my life when you have moved powerfully. May I never forget you are an awesome God, with whom nothing is impossible. Amen.</i>	Application: Choose a passage from the Bible in which God or Jesus performed a miracle. Imagine the passage playing in your imagination. Imagine yourself there as it is happening. Did it make the passage more real? This is called <i>Lecto Divino</i> .	

<b>DAY 5</b>	<b>The Lord watches over me!</b>	21 <sup>st</sup> August
<i>The Lord himself watches over you! The Lord stands beside you as your protective shade. Psalm 121:5</i>		Further study: Psalm 121,122,123
<b>“</b> <i>My help comes from the Lord who made heaven and earth!</i> <b>”</b>	How reassuring it is to know that the Lord is watching and protecting us all of our days! Psalm 121 is about God’s protection. While we should not be silly and foolish, we can know with confidence that God is watching over us – especially during these dangerous times. Look at verse 8 “The Lord keeps watch over you as you come and go, both now and forever.”	
Psalm 121:2	Questions: Read Psalm 121 and reassure your heart of God’s protection. Read verse 3, how does the Lord ‘not let you stumble’? Next time you get up in the middle of the night, thank God that he is still awake, and that he does not slumber!	
<i>Heavenly Father, thank you for delighting in my praise of you. Give me a grateful heart that is filled with words which honour you. Amen.</i>	Application: Meditate on God’s promise that your eternal destination is secure. What can the evil one do to you?	