

Sermon – Matthew 15:10-28  
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Grace Lutheran Church  
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“Tired in Sidon”

Friends in Christ, grace be unto you and peace in the name God the Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

1. The new school year is almost upon us; for some of you it has already arrived. For our family, this means we are launching another child into high school. Standing recently in the large entryway at Oak Park and River Forest High School, waiting for a parent meeting to begin, I marveled as I always do at the sheer size of the place. Of course, for the students it becomes small enough, soon enough. They quickly find their way, off to new adventures and all kinds of growth. But I was left thinking, how is he ready for high school? Wasn't it just yesterday that he was learning to walk, to talk, to tie his shoes? Young people, it seems, are more ready for what's next than we are, but the time comes whether we're ready or not. These milestones come and they cross over into something new. What's left is to hope and pray. That our young folks do well and stay safe. That they find their space and their people. That they give and receive kindness. And to the young people who are here today, we are cheering you on.
2. The Canaanite woman finds herself in a new place today. Or, at least, she finds Jesus has entered her space. She wants the same things all parents want. That her daughter would do well and be safe, that she would receive kindness. But the child is suffering, afflicted with a demon. Perhaps this Jesus, this Son of David, can help. But she is rebuked. The disciples want to dismiss her. And Jesus? He is silent at first. When he speaks, he is insulting, calling

her and her child dogs. The scene elicits all sorts of questions. Why is there evil and suffering in the world? Why does it so often land upon children? Why wouldn't Jesus willingly help them? Why does he call them names? This scene is troubling, not tidy, leaving me with one more question: Why didn't I have Pastor Troy to preach on this one?

3. Some interpreters would soften Jesus' words here. Perhaps, they suggest, he is testing the woman. Or maybe he is just teasing her, and dog is somehow an affectionate nickname. Perhaps. You and I weren't there, after all. But the plain meaning of the text seems clear. Jesus doesn't want anything to do with her. He sees a desperate woman advocating for her child and calls her a dog? Diminishes her humanity and denies her dignity? This, by the way, is one reason to take the gospels at face value. If anyone were making this stuff up, why would they put this in? Of course, Jesus is not doing anything that doesn't come naturally to humans. One can't avoid hearing the sorts of things people say these days, saying horrible things about other people because of differing ethnicity or orientation or identity. Because if we can other someone, if we can call them names and lower their standing, then we need not care about them any longer. Does this have any place in the gospel?
  
4. I recently finished this year's summer book for Grace's Religion in Literature group, *Birds Without Wings*. It tells the fictional story of a village in the Ottoman Empire in the early twentieth century, a village in which Christians and Muslims, Turks, Greeks, and Armenians, all coexist. Life is not idyllic, but they get along. For the most part, it doesn't occur to them to hate each other just because they have different faiths, or because their ancestors came from different places. But the sweep of history catches them up in the rise of nationalism – Greece for the Greeks, Turkey for the Turks, and all that – and they find their lives, and their village, torn apart. The author describes nationalism as a devilish false idol, “that specious patriotism of the morally

stunted.” The problem, of course, is not loving one’s country. The problem is believing that this is a good reason to hate other people.

5. Nevertheless, she persisted. The woman, whose name is lost to history, does what loving mothers do. Tenaciously, she hangs in there with Jesus. The scholar Eunyoung Lim calls this the “When Jesus goes low, the woman goes high” moment upon which the narrative turns. Call me a dog if you must but let me eat the crumbs from the table. And something breaks open in Jesus. What he has long been looking for – faith – he finds in someone surprising. Just last week, we heard of Peter, who has had the benefit of being in Jesus’ presence day and night. But when push comes to shove, his faith gives out and he starts to sink. Peter, whose gender, religion, and ethnicity all make him an insider, is bemoaned as one of little faith. But this woman? Her faith is mighty. The words from her mouth are holy. Healing begins to flow. For the daughter, yes, but also between Jesus and the woman. And with it, hope for the healing of this whole world. Here, in real time, Jesus is reminded that his mission is for all people. It is, of course, a mission for which he is willing to die. He takes our hatreds, our violence, upon himself that we might be forgiven and free. That we would discover, surprising as it is, that there is room enough at the table for all. Even for me. And even for them, whoever “them” is.”
6. There are no distinctions around the Lord’s table any longer. Jesus overcame his own prejudices in life, and he has overcome ours in his death. Alive, Jesus is the host at this table today. While the crumbs of grace and mercy would be more than enough for us, Jesus instead sets of a feast of life. Fed with his own body and blood, we go forth in the name of a love that no longer knows border or boundary. Where the world rejects, we welcome. We are children of God, whatever age we are, and God wants us to do well and be safe. To find our place and people here. To give and receive kindness, as we have first received from Christ. Whatever befalls us in this life, we will never again be

turned away by the God of grace whose promises, Paul proclaims, are absolutely irrevocable. Amen.

And now may the peace that passes all understanding keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus, this day and forever. Amen.