

8/16/26
12th Sunday after Pentecost
For Group Meetings from August 9th – August 15th

OUR MISSION: As a missional congregation we *celebrate* Christ's presence, *invite* people into a growing relationship with Jesus, and *equip* them to *serve* in a broken world.

Prayer of the Day: God of all peoples, your arms reach out to embrace all those who call upon you. Teach us as disciples of your Son to love the world with compassion and constancy, that your name may be known throughout the earth, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **Amen.**

BIBLICAL EQUIPPING TOGETHER:

Share: How did last week's scripture (Matthew 14:22-33) work in your life this week?

Mission:

- What was most satisfying about your ministry last week?
- Where do you see God at work?
- How did you participate in God's missional activity?
- How did inviting go last Sunday?

Hear: Matthew 15:21-28

Explore Questions: (Use these or develop your own.)

1. Why do you think Jesus initially responds with silence?
2. What is Jesus' basis for refusing help? Why does he then agree to help?
3. What do you notice about the woman's response? What does it reveal about her faith?

Connect Questions: (Use these or develop your own.)

1. When have you found yourself as the outsider? What was that experience like?
2. Share a time in your life when you showed persistence.
3. When have you been surprised by someone's faith? What did you learn?

Memorize this verse: "But she came and knelt before him, saying, 'Lord, help me.'" (Matthew 15:25) Where are you currently asking God for help?

BIBLICAL EQUIPPING APART:

Obey: During this week follow through on your intentions.

Meditate: Meditate on Psalm 56:1, 6-8. How does this speak into your life?

Reflect: What have I learned in my week of living with this text? What can I share with my group when we next meet?

Notes for ChristCare leaders:

I've got two questions arising from the Gospel reading this week. First question: can Jesus learn? I know that may sound odd. On the one hand, we may quickly answer, "Sure, why not?" Until we worry about the theological implications of that answer. If Jesus learns, a voice inside us may ask, does that mean he's not perfect, or complete, or sinless, or And suddenly a cadre of theological police seem to be patrolling the long corridors of our imagination. I ask this first question because at the heart of this challenging and even somewhat disturbing passage is a key interpretive question: Did the Canaanite woman Matthew describes pass a test or persuade the Lord? If we go with the former, then Jesus didn't really mean what he said. You know, about saying he was exclusive, ministering only to the Israelites, let alone calling her a dog. All of this was just a test, a way of bringing to harvest the faith that God had already planted in her. This is probably the more traditional read of the story. In fact, many commentators will draw our attention to the fact that the word translated "dogs" is actually the diminutive form of the word, meaning "little dog" or "puppy." I think we favor this interpretation because it saves Jesus from looking like, well, kind of a jerk. Instead, he's the all-knowing faith-tester, the drill sergeant to the new recruit, tearing her down in order to build her back up again.

The other possibility is that Jesus' own sense of God's kingdom is challenged, stretched, and enhanced by his encounter with this fierce and faithful woman. Maybe Jesus is serious and the woman takes him on and persuades him that something larger is at stake. In this context, her "great faith" isn't so much an amount but rather is simply the fact that she just holds plain holds on. She won't let Jesus go until she wrests a blessing from him on behalf of her daughter. Moms with sick kids are like that. They won't let anything get in the way of their taking care of their child. Not unsympathetic doctors or health regulations or lousy insurance, not even a slightly narrow-minded messiah-type. If you go this direction, then Jesus can learn. And he does. He learns that God's kingdom and his mission to enact that kingdom is bigger than he had initially imagined and that it is more encompassing than he'd at first dreamed. Does this mean he's not perfect or sinless or all the other things the most orthodox among us will worry about? To tell you the truth, I think those are questions this passage isn't interested in. Rather, this passage invites us to imagine that God's purpose unfolded throughout Jesus' life and ministry and continues to do so in our own lives and experiences. This tenacious and faithful woman, a complete stranger, pushed Jesus to reconsider, to learn, and to grow.

All of which brings me to a second question: can we learn? Taking a cue from Jesus' encounter with this woman, what would it look like if we ask our neighbors and friends who are not part of a church community why that is the case. Because if we want to learn, we first need to listen. And, once we've listened, we need to be open to changing how we nurture worship and congregational life in a way that is meaningful not only to those of us who consider ourselves "regulars" but also to the folks who aren't coming, or who used to come, or who might come. We're good at talking in the church; I think it's time we learn to listen. Because here's the thing: the woman Jesus meets, dismisses, and then learns from is a person, with all kinds of needs and concerns and hurts and interests. And the "great faith" she demonstrates is that she won't allow herself or, even more, her sick daughter, to be dismissed. Too many people are used to being dismissed by the church. They assume (sometimes based on experience) that the church isn't really interested in them as persons with all kinds of needs and concerns and passions, but rather just sees them as potential members or giving units. And so, they have no vested interest in being as tenacious as this woman was. For this reason, we need to reach out to the people around us as people who have a lot to teach us, and we need to do this not as a strategy to grow our congregation but because that's what Jesus discovered from this encounter with this woman and that's what he would have us learn from her as well.

Thanks be to God,

Pastor Thadd (tbook@desertcross.org)

Traditional version:

Our Father who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come,
thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
As we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from
evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power,
And the glory, forever and ever. Amen

Contemporary version:

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name, your kingdom come,
your will be done on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins as we forgive those
Who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial
And deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the
power, and the glory are yours,
Now and forever. Amen