

RESPONDING TO THE OUTSIDER—Matthew 15:21-28
Towson Presbyterian, August 20th, 2017
Debbie Schmidt, guest preacher

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I'm sure it's not often that both your pastors are out of town on the same day.
 I'm glad that Rob and Joel are taking this time away
 and hope they and their families will come back refreshed.
As a pastor's wife, myself,
 I know how demanding the job can be
 and how important it is to get away some times.

In our text today,
Jesus and his disciples are getting some time away.
 It's not clear whether Jesus is looking for rest
 or whether he is withdrawing from the increasing resistance
 he has been facing
 from the leaders of the Jewish religious community.

Either way,
he and his disciples have retreated to an area where there is a good chance they won't be bothered—
 they have left Judea and are now in Gentile territory.

Our text tells us Jesus and his disciples went to the region of Tyre and Sidon.
 These two cities were in ancient Phoenicia,
 what is now Syria.
If Jesus went there to get away from the demands of ministry,
 his plan didn't work.

It's not long after his arrival that the woman in our story comes to him.
 She is probably a local resident
 and so is ethnically different from Jesus.
Matthew emphasizes this point telling us she is a Canaanite.
 This information is important for the rest of the story
 because Jewish people would not expect her to be a person of faith.

She calls out, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me."
 It's likely these were not the exact words the woman used.
 They are words that would have been used as part of the Jewish worship.
 But Matthew puts them in the mouth of this woman
 to show her sincerity
 and her confidence that Jesus can help her.
She tells Jesus her daughter is tormented by a demon and begs him to heal her.

But Jesus is silent.

Now his disciples speak up.

They tell Jesus to do something to make her go away.

We don't know whether they expect Jesus to chase her off
or to heal her daughter so she will leave them alone.

But it is pretty clear that they are not motivated by sympathy for the woman.

Their only concern is their own discomfort with the situation.

Jesus has remained silent,

bombarded by these two demands,
from the woman and from his disciples.

He finally speaks, saying, **"I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel."**

Jesus's words do not actually answer either of the demands.

It almost seems as if Jesus is thinking out loud.

He seems to be pondering how the woman's request
fits into his mission as he understands it.

He knew he was sent to God's people, Israel.

And he knew that Israel was intended to be a light to all the nations.

So how does this Gentile woman fit into the plan at this point in his ministry?

We sometimes assume that Jesus knew everything about the people he met and about the details of his mission.

After all, he was God.

We sometimes forget that Jesus was fully God, and fully human. Hebrews
5:8 tells us that Jesus had to learn by the things he suffered.

Even in the Garden of Gethsemane,
we see Jesus learning as he asks if there is any other way,
"if it be possible take this cup from me."

As Jesus is contemplating his mission, the woman again pleads for his help.

He hasn't given her much encouragement
but on the other hand, he hasn't say no
and he didn't chase her away.

And so she persists.

Jesus speaks again:

"It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs."

Again, it's not clear who Jesus is addressing—
is he speaking to the disciples?

To the woman?

Is he talking to himself?

What is clear is that this is pretty insulting language.

Jesus is saying that his mission is first for the Jews and then Gentiles
and he says it using a common image Jews of his day
would use to describe a Gentile--dogs.

These are startling and harsh words coming from the mouth of Jesus.

There is one difference in the word Jesus uses
that may put his words in a slightly better light.

In Jewish communities of the time,
pet animals were not common
so the only word they had for dog referred to the almost feral dogs that
roamed the streets.

By contrast, in Phoenician culture,
they made a distinction between wild dogs
and the dogs that were pets in their homes.

When Jesus refers to dogs, he uses the word that indicates pets.

If Jesus' words are intended primarily for his disciples,
he may be gently prodding them to confront their assumptions.

He refers to Gentiles as dogs,
as the disciples probably would themselves.

But in Jesus' version, they are no longer on the street,
outside the household,

but under the same roof as the rest of the family.

Could Gentiles be part of the household of God?

The woman is undeterred by Jesus' words
and instead sees an opening to continue to press her point,
"Yes," she says,
"but even the dogs get the crumbs from the table."

Jesus is delighted by her faith.

His response could be translated,
"O, woman, your faith is terrific!"

He is astonished to see deep faith in this unlikely person,
a Gentile woman.

Her faith stands in contrast to the lack of faith
Jesus has seen during so many of his encounters with the religious leaders
of Israel.

And in this moment, it becomes clear to Jesus
that this woman is no longer an outsider,
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Our country is currently embroiled in controversy

over who is inside and who is outside;
who belongs in our country and who does not;
who really represents what we value as Americans
and who does not.

And sadly, this controversy has made its way into the church.

Churches have lost members over political differences
and the same name calling and stereotyping
we see in the public square and on social media
has also found its way into our churches.

Last weekend in Charlottesville,
we witnessed the angry calls for exclusion
by the white supremacy groups that gathered there.
We rightly stand against the bigotry and hatred those groups promote.
But as we stand against these evils,
we, ourselves, can become divisive and uncharitable.

For people on the political left
it can be tempting to assume that everyone on the political right
shares the hateful views we saw in Charlottesville.
This is unfair
and may stand in the way of constructive dialogue
about our differences.

In the wake of Charlottesville
we've seen people on both the left and the right,
distancing themselves from the racist ideology
of the white supremacists.

We want to make clear that bigotry and hatred do not represent us.

We are not racists,
but, if we're honest with ourselves,
we are not always where we'd like to be
when it comes to relating across racial lines.

I know I'm not.

Let me give you an example.

Just this week, I went to Towson Mall
and as I parked I noticed a group of African-American teenagers standing
around the area by the stairs and elevator.
I felt a little uneasy and exposed
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I caught myself and went ahead and parked there
and the group was gone by the time I got to the elevator.
I don't like that I have that initial reaction.

I'm ashamed that those stereotypes enter my mind
and I have to admit that if it had been a group of Anglo teenagers,
I wouldn't have given it a second thought.

These issues and divisions in our country seem so deep, it's hard to imagine a way forward.

Our passage offers us some possibilities, first with a challenge and then with an invitation.

The challenge is actually a choice—

whose example will we follow?

We can follow the example of the disciples.

We can ask Jesus to "Make them go away,"

whoever the "them" is for us—

it may be the families living in Chapter 9 housing in our neighborhood,

it may be the neighbor with a huge sign for his candidate on his lawn,

or it may be a family member

or old friend who shares offensive posts on Facebook.

Where do you find yourself thinking, "Lord, make them go away?"

The other choice this passage offers is to follow the example of the woman.

She comes to Jesus because she knows she needs help.

She knows her problem is too big to deal with on her own.

And she comes because she believes Jesus can help her.

She comes in humility,

in need,

and in deep faith.

Where do you need to be healed?

Where has hatred taken root in your heart?

Are there people in your life you need to forgive?

Are there people whose forgiveness you need?

As we bring these needs to our gracious God, like the woman in our story, we can be healed.

As I said, this passage also offers us an invitation.

The invitation is to follow the example of Jesus.

Jesus enters the circumstances in our story with preconceptions.

But he also enters with a deep desire to follow God's leading

and do what pleases God.

He was attentive to those around him

but he was also attentive to the movement of God.

Jesus had a wholehearted desire to obey God,

to cooperate with whatever God was doing.

Because of that he could look past his preconceptions
to see the unexpected but delightful way God was at work
in the Canaanite woman.

So what is God doing in your sphere?

Where is God challenging you to look beyond your preconceptions?

How is God challenging you to be a channel of peace, of love, of grace?

Are you able to see God at work in the life of that person
you are tempted to judge, or stereotype?

And how are you cultivating an awareness of God?

How do you sense God's promptings?

None of these things come naturally to us.

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We rightly stand against the bigotry and hatred those groups promote.
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Our passage offers us some possibilities, first with a challenge and then with an invitation.

The challenge is actually a choice—

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We can ask Jesus to “Make them go away,”

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She comes in humility,

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Where do you need to be healed?

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Are there people in your life you need to forgive?

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The invitation is to follow the example of Jesus.

Jesus enters the circumstances in our story with preconceptions.

But he also enters with a deep desire to follow God's leading

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He was attentive to those around him

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Jesus had a wholehearted desire to obey God,

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So what is God doing in your sphere?

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Are you able to see God at work in the life of that person
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None of these things come naturally to us.

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Our passage offers us some possibilities, first with a challenge and then with an invitation.

The challenge is actually a choice—

whose example will we follow?

We can follow the example of the disciples.

We can ask Jesus to "Make them go away,"

whoever the "them" is for us—

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She comes in humility,

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Where do you need to be healed?

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Are there people in your life you need to forgive?

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As we bring these needs to our gracious God, like the woman in our story, we can be healed.

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The invitation is to follow the example of Jesus.

Jesus enters the circumstances in our story with preconceptions.

But he also enters with a deep desire to follow God's leading

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He was attentive to those around him

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Jesus had a wholehearted desire to obey God,

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Because of that he could look past his preconceptions
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So what is God doing in your sphere?

Where is God challenging you to look beyond your preconceptions?

How is God challenging you to be a channel of peace, of love, of grace?

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None of these things come naturally to us.

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Either way,
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She tells Jesus her daughter is tormented by a demon and begs him to heal her.

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They tell Jesus to do something to make her go away.

We don't know whether they expect Jesus to chase her off
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But it is pretty clear that they are not motivated by sympathy for the woman.

Their only concern is their own discomfort with the situation.

Jesus has remained silent,

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He finally speaks, saying, **"I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel."**

Jesus's words do not actually answer either of the demands.

It almost seems as if Jesus is thinking out loud.

He seems to be pondering how the woman's request
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He knew he was sent to God's people, Israel.

And he knew that Israel was intended to be a light to all the nations.

So how does this Gentile woman fit into the plan at this point in his ministry?

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And so she persists.

Jesus speaks again:

"It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs."

Again, it's not clear who Jesus is addressing—
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What is clear is that this is pretty insulting language.

Jesus is saying that his mission is first for the Jews and then Gentiles
and he says it using a common image Jews of his day
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She comes in humility,

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Where do you need to be healed?

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Are there people in your life you need to forgive?

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As we bring these needs to our gracious God, like the woman in our story, we can be healed.

As I said, this passage also offers us an invitation.

The invitation is to follow the example of Jesus.

Jesus enters the circumstances in our story with preconceptions.

But he also enters with a deep desire to follow God's leading

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He was attentive to those around him

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Jesus had a wholehearted desire to obey God,

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Because of that he could look past his preconceptions
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So what is God doing in your sphere?

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Are you able to see God at work in the life of that person
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None of these things come naturally to us.

We can't do this on our own.

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They tell Jesus to do something to make her go away.

We don't know whether they expect Jesus to chase her off
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Their only concern is their own discomfort with the situation.

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He finally speaks, saying, **"I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel."**

Jesus's words do not actually answer either of the demands.

It almost seems as if Jesus is thinking out loud.

He seems to be pondering how the woman's request
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He knew he was sent to God's people, Israel.

And he knew that Israel was intended to be a light to all the nations.

So how does this Gentile woman fit into the plan at this point in his ministry?

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And so she persists.

Jesus speaks again:

"It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs."

Again, it's not clear who Jesus is addressing—
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What is clear is that this is pretty insulting language.

Jesus is saying that his mission is first for the Jews and then Gentiles
and he says it using a common image Jews of his day
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These are startling and harsh words coming from the mouth of Jesus.

There is one difference in the word Jesus uses
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Jesus enters the circumstances in our story with preconceptions.

But he also enters with a deep desire to follow God's leading

and do what pleases God.

He was attentive to those around him

but he was also attentive to the movement of God.

Jesus had a wholehearted desire to obey God,

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Because of that he could look past his preconceptions
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So what is God doing in your sphere?

Where is God challenging you to look beyond your preconceptions?

How is God challenging you to be a channel of peace, of love, of grace?

Are you able to see God at work in the life of that person
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And how are you cultivating an awareness of God?

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None of these things come naturally to us.

We can't do this on our own.

But as we come to Jesus in humility
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And as we find healing, we in turn can become healers.

RESPONDING TO THE OUTSIDER—Matthew 15:21-28
Towson Presbyterian, August 20th, 2017
Debbie Schmidt, guest preacher

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 I'm glad that Rob and Joel are taking this time away
 and hope they and their families will come back refreshed.
As a pastor's wife, myself,
 I know how demanding the job can be
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In our text today,
Jesus and his disciples are getting some time away.
 It's not clear whether Jesus is looking for rest
 or whether he is withdrawing from the increasing resistance
 he has been facing
 from the leaders of the Jewish religious community.

Either way,
he and his disciples have retreated to an area where there is a good chance they won't be bothered—
 they have left Judea and are now in Gentile territory.

Our text tells us Jesus and his disciples went to the region of Tyre and Sidon.
 These two cities were in ancient Phoenicia,
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If Jesus went there to get away from the demands of ministry,
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It's not long after his arrival that the woman in our story comes to him.
 She is probably a local resident
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Matthew emphasizes this point telling us she is a Canaanite.
 This information is important for the rest of the story
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She calls out, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me."
 It's likely these were not the exact words the woman used.
 They are words that would have been used as part of the Jewish worship.
 But Matthew puts them in the mouth of this woman
 to show her sincerity
 and her confidence that Jesus can help her.
She tells Jesus her daughter is tormented by a demon and begs him to heal her.

But Jesus is silent.

Now his disciples speak up.

They tell Jesus to do something to make her go away.

We don't know whether they expect Jesus to chase her off
or to heal her daughter so she will leave them alone.

But it is pretty clear that they are not motivated by sympathy for the woman.

Their only concern is their own discomfort with the situation.

Jesus has remained silent,

bombarded by these two demands,
from the woman and from his disciples.

He finally speaks, saying, **"I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel."**

Jesus's words do not actually answer either of the demands.

It almost seems as if Jesus is thinking out loud.

He seems to be pondering how the woman's request
fits into his mission as he understands it.

He knew he was sent to God's people, Israel.

And he knew that Israel was intended to be a light to all the nations.

So how does this Gentile woman fit into the plan at this point in his ministry?

We sometimes assume that Jesus knew everything about the people he met and about the details of his mission.

After all, he was God.

We sometimes forget that Jesus was fully God, and fully human. Hebrews
5:8 tells us that Jesus had to learn by the things he suffered.

Even in the Garden of Gethsemane,
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"if it be possible take this cup from me."

As Jesus is contemplating his mission, the woman again pleads for his help.

He hasn't given her much encouragement
but on the other hand, he hasn't say no
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And so she persists.

Jesus speaks again:

"It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs."

Again, it's not clear who Jesus is addressing—
is he speaking to the disciples?

To the woman?

Is he talking to himself?

What is clear is that this is pretty insulting language.

Jesus is saying that his mission is first for the Jews and then Gentiles
and he says it using a common image Jews of his day
would use to describe a Gentile--dogs.

These are startling and harsh words coming from the mouth of Jesus.

There is one difference in the word Jesus uses
that may put his words in a slightly better light.

In Jewish communities of the time,
pet animals were not common
so the only word they had for dog referred to the almost feral dogs that
roamed the streets.

By contrast, in Phoenician culture,
they made a distinction between wild dogs
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When Jesus refers to dogs, he uses the word that indicates pets.

If Jesus' words are intended primarily for his disciples,
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He refers to Gentiles as dogs,
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But in Jesus' version, they are no longer on the street,
outside the household,

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Could Gentiles be part of the household of God?

The woman is undeterred by Jesus' words
and instead sees an opening to continue to press her point,
"Yes," she says,
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Jesus is delighted by her faith.

His response could be translated,
"O, woman, your faith is terrific!"

He is astonished to see deep faith in this unlikely person,
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Her faith stands in contrast to the lack of faith
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Our country is currently embroiled in controversy

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And sadly, this controversy has made its way into the church.

Churches have lost members over political differences
and the same name calling and stereotyping
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Last weekend in Charlottesville,
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We rightly stand against the bigotry and hatred those groups promote.
But as we stand against these evils,
we, ourselves, can become divisive and uncharitable.

For people on the political left
it can be tempting to assume that everyone on the political right
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This is unfair
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In the wake of Charlottesville
we've seen people on both the left and the right,
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We want to make clear that bigotry and hatred do not represent us.

We are not racists,
but, if we're honest with ourselves,
we are not always where we'd like to be
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I know I'm not.

Let me give you an example.

Just this week, I went to Towson Mall
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These issues and divisions in our country seem so deep, it's hard to imagine a way forward.

Our passage offers us some possibilities, first with a challenge and then with an invitation.

The challenge is actually a choice—

whose example will we follow?

We can follow the example of the disciples.

We can ask Jesus to "Make them go away,"

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Where do you need to be healed?

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Jesus enters the circumstances in our story with preconceptions.

But he also enters with a deep desire to follow God's leading

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He was attentive to those around him

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Jesus had a wholehearted desire to obey God,

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She comes in humility,

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Where do you need to be healed?

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The invitation is to follow the example of Jesus.

Jesus enters the circumstances in our story with preconceptions.

But he also enters with a deep desire to follow God's leading

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He was attentive to those around him

but he was also attentive to the movement of God.

Jesus had a wholehearted desire to obey God,

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Because of that he could look past his preconceptions
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So what is God doing in your sphere?

Where is God challenging you to look beyond your preconceptions?

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None of these things come naturally to us.

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 These two cities were in ancient Phoenicia,
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He seems to be pondering how the woman's request
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These issues and divisions in our country seem so deep, it's hard to imagine a way forward.

Our passage offers us some possibilities, first with a challenge and then with an invitation.

The challenge is actually a choice—

whose example will we follow?

We can follow the example of the disciples.

We can ask Jesus to "Make them go away,"

whoever the "them" is for us—

it may be the families living in Chapter 9 housing in our neighborhood,

it may be the neighbor with a huge sign for his candidate on his lawn,

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Where do you find yourself thinking, "Lord, make them go away?"

The other choice this passage offers is to follow the example of the woman.

She comes to Jesus because she knows she needs help.

She knows her problem is too big to deal with on her own.

And she comes because she believes Jesus can help her.

She comes in humility,

in need,

and in deep faith.

Where do you need to be healed?

Where has hatred taken root in your heart?

Are there people in your life you need to forgive?

Are there people whose forgiveness you need?

As we bring these needs to our gracious God, like the woman in our story, we can be healed.

As I said, this passage also offers us an invitation.

The invitation is to follow the example of Jesus.

Jesus enters the circumstances in our story with preconceptions.

But he also enters with a deep desire to follow God's leading

and do what pleases God.

He was attentive to those around him

but he was also attentive to the movement of God.

Jesus had a wholehearted desire to obey God,

to cooperate with whatever God was doing.

Because of that he could look past his preconceptions
to see the unexpected but delightful way God was at work
in the Canaanite woman.

So what is God doing in your sphere?

Where is God challenging you to look beyond your preconceptions?

How is God challenging you to be a channel of peace, of love, of grace?

Are you able to see God at work in the life of that person
you are tempted to judge, or stereotype?

And how are you cultivating an awareness of God?

How do you sense God's promptings?

None of these things come naturally to us.

We can't do this on our own.

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RESPONDING TO THE OUTSIDER—Matthew 15:21-28
Towson Presbyterian, August 20th, 2017
Debbie Schmidt, guest preacher

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I'm sure it's not often that both your pastors are out of town on the same day.
 I'm glad that Rob and Joel are taking this time away
 and hope they and their families will come back refreshed.
As a pastor's wife, myself,
 I know how demanding the job can be
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In our text today,
Jesus and his disciples are getting some time away.
 It's not clear whether Jesus is looking for rest
 or whether he is withdrawing from the increasing resistance
 he has been facing
 from the leaders of the Jewish religious community.

Either way,
he and his disciples have retreated to an area where there is a good chance they won't be bothered—
 they have left Judea and are now in Gentile territory.

Our text tells us Jesus and his disciples went to the region of Tyre and Sidon.
 These two cities were in ancient Phoenicia,
 what is now Syria.
If Jesus went there to get away from the demands of ministry,
 his plan didn't work.

It's not long after his arrival that the woman in our story comes to him.
 She is probably a local resident
 and so is ethnically different from Jesus.
Matthew emphasizes this point telling us she is a Canaanite.
 This information is important for the rest of the story
 because Jewish people would not expect her to be a person of faith.

She calls out, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me."
 It's likely these were not the exact words the woman used.
 They are words that would have been used as part of the Jewish worship.
 But Matthew puts them in the mouth of this woman
 to show her sincerity
 and her confidence that Jesus can help her.
She tells Jesus her daughter is tormented by a demon and begs him to heal her.

But Jesus is silent.

Now his disciples speak up.

They tell Jesus to do something to make her go away.

We don't know whether they expect Jesus to chase her off
or to heal her daughter so she will leave them alone.

But it is pretty clear that they are not motivated by sympathy for the woman.

Their only concern is their own discomfort with the situation.

Jesus has remained silent,

bombarded by these two demands,
from the woman and from his disciples.

He finally speaks, saying, **"I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel."**

Jesus's words do not actually answer either of the demands.

It almost seems as if Jesus is thinking out loud.

He seems to be pondering how the woman's request
fits into his mission as he understands it.

He knew he was sent to God's people, Israel.

And he knew that Israel was intended to be a light to all the nations.

So how does this Gentile woman fit into the plan at this point in his ministry?

We sometimes assume that Jesus knew everything about the people he met and about the details of his mission.

After all, he was God.

We sometimes forget that Jesus was fully God, and fully human. Hebrews
5:8 tells us that Jesus had to learn by the things he suffered.

Even in the Garden of Gethsemane,
we see Jesus learning as he asks if there is any other way,
"if it be possible take this cup from me."

As Jesus is contemplating his mission, the woman again pleads for his help.

He hasn't given her much encouragement
but on the other hand, he hasn't say no
and he didn't chase her away.

And so she persists.

Jesus speaks again:

"It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs."

Again, it's not clear who Jesus is addressing—
is he speaking to the disciples?

To the woman?

Is he talking to himself?

What is clear is that this is pretty insulting language.

Jesus is saying that his mission is first for the Jews and then Gentiles
and he says it using a common image Jews of his day
would use to describe a Gentile--dogs.

These are startling and harsh words coming from the mouth of Jesus.

There is one difference in the word Jesus uses
that may put his words in a slightly better light.

In Jewish communities of the time,
pet animals were not common
so the only word they had for dog referred to the almost feral dogs that
roamed the streets.

By contrast, in Phoenician culture,
they made a distinction between wild dogs
and the dogs that were pets in their homes.

When Jesus refers to dogs, he uses the word that indicates pets.

If Jesus' words are intended primarily for his disciples,
he may be gently prodding them to confront their assumptions.

He refers to Gentiles as dogs,
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But in Jesus' version, they are no longer on the street,
outside the household,

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Could Gentiles be part of the household of God?

The woman is undeterred by Jesus' words
and instead sees an opening to continue to press her point,
"Yes," she says,
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Jesus is delighted by her faith.

His response could be translated,
"O, woman, your faith is terrific!"

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Her faith stands in contrast to the lack of faith

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