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A Faith Like Hers
Matthew 15: 21-28

²¹ Jesus left that place and went away to the **district of Tyre and Sidon**. ²² Just then a **Canaanite woman** from that region came out and started shouting, “**Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon.**” ²³ But he did **not answer** her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, “Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us.” ²⁴ He answered, “**I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.**” ²⁵ But she came and knelt before him, saying, “**Lord, help me.**” ²⁶ He answered, “**It is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs.**” ²⁷ She said, “**Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’^[1] table.**” ²⁸ Then Jesus answered her, “Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.” And her **daughter was healed** from that moment.

Have you ever BARGAINED with God?

Ever **begged** for God’s mercy and help?
Ever **questioned** God—over and over again?
Most of us have, right?

This woman is doing just that.

But, she’s in a **worse** situation, because she is a **WOMAN** in the time of Jesus. Which means she has no power or authority, she is not supposed to be in public alone, or talking to a man other than her husband!

And, she is a CANAANITE! A Gentile—talking to a Jew!

Now, remember who the Canaanites are—
they are people God said to conquer to take over the promised land!
They are a people who worship idols, many, many gods, not one.
God forbids and even begs the Israelites
to avoid intermingling with Canaanites,
again and again throughout the Old Testament.

Why? Well, God does this because the Israelites were MONOTHEISTIC—

They believed in the One Living God,
in a world of many gods, countless deities,

and all kinds of pagan rituals and practices
that God warned the Israelites against
(things like temple prostitution, and sacrificing children to idols!)

***So this woman is CROSSING all kinds of boundaries
and social norms to talk to Jesus.***

And to make matters worse, she has a *demon-possessed daughter*.
We don't know for sure what the daughter's ailment was,
but anyone demon possessed was an **OUTCAST**—
someone to be avoided or shunned.

But that's only a fraction of the SHOCKING nature of this story!

The Jesus we see in this conversation....well, I think if we are honest,
We have to say that Jesus is....*not acting like the Jesus we know!*
He doesn't even acknowledge her request at first!

And when the disciples urge him to send her away, Jesus says to her:

"I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of ISRAEL."

Really, Jesus?

But—he is

Saying exactly what any Jewish rabbi, or respectable Jewish person,
Might say to a Canaanite woman with a demon-possessed daughter!

But then.... it gets—WORSE!

²⁵ *But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me."*

And Jesus answered,

"It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the DOGS."

Eek—this is how Jesus responds to a poor woman, kneeling before him,
Begging him to help her.

Some commentators have tried to SOFTEN Jesus' language

Or have said he must have been *winking, or joking, or being sarcastic....*

But what if it's not about that?

I DON'T think we should try to SOFTEN it, or even understand it....

or EXPLAIN his comments away.

What if it's really important for us to understand

what this woman was UP AGAINST?

That she had absolutely *everything and everyone AGAINST her in that society!*

What if it's important to see what USUALLY happened in these circumstances,
 when a single Gentile woman,
 with a demon-possessed daughter, tried to get help, from a Jewish rabbi?
 What if Jesus wants us to understand
 that this lady and her situation *are pretty HOPELESS?*

But that's NOT the end of the story, is it?

In fact, Jesus ignores the pleas of his disciples to send the woman away.
 Jesus keeps talking to her!

²⁷ *She says,*

“Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the CRUMBS that fall from their masters’ table.”

This woman KNOWS how the religious establishment works.

And she even acknowledges that Jesus surely came for Israel,
 Not people like her.

So she says to Jesus: *“Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the CRUMBS that fall from their masters’ table.”*

She DOESN'T EVEN ASK for what she thinks is not hers to take.

She just asks for **CRUMBS** off the table,

The scraps!

The leftovers!

That's *how sure she is* that Jesus can heal her daughter!

*She takes a hopeless situation,
 and turns it into a MOMENT OF HELP!*

She *doesn't really care* about the public opinion of her or her daughter.

She is a **desperate MOM**.

And most moms would **do ANYTHING** for a sick child!

Even ignoring slurs and insults.

She DOESN'T CARE--This is not about her.

She is begging for her daughter, and she believes that Jesus can heal her.

This is a woman of persistence!

And Humility!

Of Courage and strength!

Maybe this story is not just about the power of Jesus,

But also the COURAGE AND FAITH of this unlikely hero!

Because *Then Jesus answered her, “Woman, great is your faith!
Let it be done for you as you wish.”*
And her daughter was **healed** from that moment.

The most unlikely person is the—hero!
She is our role model, the one with GREAT FAITH!
And her great faith breaks open the grace and mercy of God!
Her daughter is healed!

So what does it all mean FOR US?
Is this just a story encouraging us to have more faith?
Or is there more here for us to learn?
If we see only her faith as the point of this story,
We can fall into an all-too-familiar trap.

Believing that Great faith=Miracles.
The more you believe, the more you receive.
Like there’s a ‘**formula**’ for getting what we want from God.
Or a test to pass to receive help from God!

Nothing could be further from the truth.
Sure, some churches preach that.
It’s known as ‘**name it and claim it**’ faith.
And it’s just like it sounds---you tell God what you want---
and if you believe enough—you receive it!
Name it and claim it.

Which is a horrible theology.
And not true to scripture, not true to the ministry of Jesus!
Because that kind of faith is all about US.
OUR supposed power, OUR request, OUR wants and desires.
It’s not about God, or what Jesus wants for us—
which might be the opposite of what we ‘want’!
It’s very **proud, and arrogant** of us
if we say that having more faith means getting our way!

This woman is not acting that way!
She approaches Jesus in **HUMILITY, and surrender.....**
She’s so humble that she asks for just the crumbs from the table for her daughter.

She approaches Jesus as a VULNERABLE, needy person.

And appeals to his humanity, his compassion.

She's not proud, she's not insisting on her own way.

She is pleading for help.

She risks social humiliation by venturing out to talk,

Alone, to a strange man, a Jewish rabbi,

And to beg him, kneeling before him, to heal her daughter.

So what do we ***LEARN about faith*** from this woman?

We definitely learn about PERSISTENCE.

It reminds us of Luke 18, where a ***widow keeps beating*** on the door of the judge's house, until he grants her justice!

And Jesus commends her faith.

It reminds us of Matthew 9, where ***a woman who had been hemorrhaging*** for 12 years risks alienation, by going out in public, and touching the hem of Jesus' robe!
And he commends her faith!

But we also learn about the STRUGGLE of faith.

About the power of humbly coming to Jesus—with our needs, and our pain.

Of risking it all, to reach out to the one and only person who can truly help!

What if true faith is the STRUGGLE OF FAITH?

Not making a list of what we want and telling God to give it to us
(as if God is a genie in a bottle),

But rather, struggling with God---questioning God—begging God,
Bargaining with God.

Because ALL of that—is ok!

It's fine.

To struggle with God is part of a real, authentic faith!

So many people have asked me if it's OK to QUESTION GOD---

To be angry with God,

And my answer is--Of course it's ok!

When we struggle with God,

we are just joining a long line of faithful ancestors
in the many ways THEY struggled with God!

Did you know that the name ISRAEL means 'WRESTLING WITH GOD'?

Remember how God changed Jacob's name to Israel,

after he spent a night wrestling with a strange man,
Who was actually God!

And the people of God were known as the ISRAELITES

And they struggled with God again and again—

Remember the ***40 years of wandering in the wilderness***

after God parted the Red Sea and rescued them from slavery in Egypt?

The STRUGGLE of faith IS FAITH!

Jesus commends the struggle!

Jesus commends that honest, humble faith!

The question is, will we dare to—have FAITH LIKE HERS?

What would that look like in ***YOUR life?***

Remember the WWJD bracelets—What Would Jesus Do?

Well, what if we should also ask ourselves,

What Would the Canaanite Woman do? WWCWD?

(not quite as catchy!)

Her faith is honest, real, humble....and it's RISKY.

She crosses all the boundaries in that society,

To get healing for her daughter.

In this amazing story of courage,

We see ***Jesus AND this unlikely hero, cross social boundaries,***

To break open the river of God's grace!

I wonder if WE are willing to do the same?

Are we willing to cross the boundaries of society,

To break open God's grace?

Are we willing to break down walls, throw out societal norms---

all to receive, and share grace?

What do we put ON THE LINE, for our faith today?

This is just one of dozens of stories about the ministry of Jesus, when he dares to

INCLUDE those whom society deems ***EXCLUDED***.

Who is that today?

Who do ***WE EXCLUDE***, even if only in our hearts?

Who do we consider IN, and OUT of the body of Christ?

Jesus came for ALL PEOPLE to know the love and grace of God.
 He proclaimed the Good News of the Gospel—not just for some, but **FOR ALL**.
 Which means, we will have to *step outside our comfort zone*,
 We will be required to
TAKE RISKS, CROSS BOUNDARIES, BREAK DOWN WALLS,
 To break open the Kingdom of God, “on earth as it is in heaven”.

What does that look like for YOU?
 What does that look like, **FOR THIS CONGREGATION**—
 in our community, and beyond?

Jesus’ HEART WAS BROKEN for this woman and her daughter.
 It didn’t matter her ethnicity, or gender, or the ailment of her child.

**WHO AND WHAT SITUATIONS
 ARE BREAKING THE HEART OF GOD, TODAY?**
 And how are we being called, to have a risky faith, like hers?
 A bold encounter?
 How are we called today,
 to *step across boundaries.... to share the LOVE of Jesus Christ?*

St. Teresa of Avila wisely wrote:
“Christ has no body now on earth, but yours”.
 That’s us, my friends.
 May God give us the courage and faith we need—**A FAITH LIKE HERS.**

That is the **GOOD NEWS of the Gospel** today.
 And for that, all God’s people can say together, Amen!