



Call to worship: In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen. I wait for the Lord; my soul waits, and in his word I hope; my soul waits for the Lord more than those who watch for the morning, more than those who watch for the morning. O Israel, hope in the Lord! For with the Lord there is steadfast love, and with him is great power to redeem. It is he who will redeem Israel from all its iniquities. Psalm 130: 5-8 (NRSV)

Opening Prayer: Merciful God, we give you thanks and praise on this wonderful day. You hold the past, the present and the future. In you, Lord, we find our hope. As Peter said to Jesus, we also say, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." Lord, nothing compares with your presence. Therefore, we come before you today just as we are. Help us to worship you in spirit and truth. Open our hearts to hear your voice and give us the courage to receive the change needed in our lives. Amen.

Hymn StF 320 Father, whose everlasting love https://youtu.be/owrn3Dw_0JI?si=wOc9HJZ0ZYXSDQc9

Father, whose everlasting Love	for all You have in Christ prepared
Your only Son for sinners gave,	sufficient, sovereign, saving grace.
whose grace to all did freely move,	
and sent Him to the world to save.	The world He suffered to redeem;
	for all He has atonement made;
Help us Your mercy to extol,	for those that will not come to Him
immense, unfathomed, unconfined;	the ransom of his life was paid.
to praise the Lamb who died for all,	
the Saviour of all humankind.	Arise, O God, maintain Your cause!
Your undistinguishing regard	The fulness of the nation's call;
was cast on Adam's fallen race;	lift up the standard of Your cross,
	and all shall own You died for all.

Prayer of Praise and Thanksgiving: Lord, we give you thanks and praise, for you have stepped into human history, breaking every barrier by sending your Son to us. *Lord, we praise your holy name and give you thanks.*
Lord, we marvel at your words and ways, through which you change our hearts and lives for the work of your kingdom and lead us towards eternal life. *Lord, we praise your holy name and give you thanks.*
Lord, we magnify you for your work through the mission and ministry of your Church, calling it to be an agent of change in the world. *Lord, we praise your holy name and give you thanks.*
Lord, we thank you for your Holy Spirit, who continues to challenge, renew and transform us into the likeness of Christ. *Lord, we praise your holy name and give you thanks.*
Lord, receive our worship and make us willing to listen, courageous to respond and ready to change according to your will. *Lord, we praise your holy name and give you thanks.* Amen.

Prayer of Confession : Dear God, our true Shepherd, your Spirit calls us back to abide in your presence. We come before you, bringing the ways and works through which we have harmed your purpose and failed to follow your will. Though you stepped into our stories, we were reluctant to hear the stories of your people. We failed to step into their lives and become agents of change. We complained about our limitations but failed to come out of our comfort zones. When we held authority and power, we were unwilling to change our minds, attitudes and priorities. *Lord, forgive us.*

These words of confession come before you with our desire and willingness to walk with you in newness of life. Accept our hearts and lives. Help us to live closely with you and long for the coming of your kingdom. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Reading: Matthew 15:21-28 (NIV) - The Faith of a Canaanite Woman. : Leaving that place, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is demon-possessed and suffering terribly." Jesus did not answer a word. So, his disciples came to him and urged him, "Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us." He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of

Israel.” The woman came and knelt before him. “Lord, help me!” she said. He replied, “It is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to the dogs.” “Yes, it is, Lord,” she said. “Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master’s table.” Then Jesus said to her, “Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted.” And her daughter was healed at that moment.

Sermon - Will You Change?

When we look at our albums and old photographs, we immediately realise how much we have changed. We see changes in our appearance, our families, our communities and the world around us. Physical changes are easy to recognise. But the more important question is: have you ever changed your mind? The narration of the Canaanite woman’s faith is one of the most uncomfortable stories in the Gospels. Because we must admit that Jesus’ response is puzzling, his silence troubles us, and his words appear unusually harsh.

When I journey through a biblical narrative, as I often do in my reading of Scripture, I try to picture the scene and place myself among the characters of the story. I invite and encourage all of you to journey with me through this whole narrative in Matthew chapter 15:21-28 and to see it through the eyes of its different characters. From Matthew’s account, we see three main characters, or groups, in this story. The first one, of course, is the Canaanite woman. The disciples form the second group, and the third character is Jesus.

Firstly, what do we see in the Canaanite woman?

Among all the Gentile nations, Israel viewed the Canaanites with particular hostility. From Israel’s perspective, the Canaanites had occupied the land God had promised to Israel. Therefore, we can imagine the rivalry between Israelites and Canaanites. We need to keep this difficult history in mind when Matthew deliberately introduces her as “a Canaanite woman.” However, when I was reading this narrative, one particular expression in verse 22 caught my attention: “A Canaanite woman came out.” The words “came out” particularly struck me. So, I looked at the Greek word that is ἐξεληθοῦσα—exelthousa—which means “having come out” or “coming out.” Literally, Matthew tells us that she came out from that region and approached Jesus.

But when we consider her social, cultural and religious background, I believe her coming out was more than a physical movement. It was a courageous and revolutionary step. She came out from her own surroundings. She came out from the silence of her suffering. She came out across the religious and cultural barriers surrounding her. She came out carrying the pain of a mother whose daughter was suffering. Her response is remarkable as she says, “Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master’s table. She refuses to believe that God’s mercy is so limited that nothing can reach her suffering child. She discovers hope even within the difficult image placed before her.

Dear friends, coming out can be an act of faith. Change starts when we change ourselves, not the context or situation. Therefore, the Canaanite woman teaches us that faith is not always silently waiting for something to happen. You may have come across a young girl from the Philippines named Rhea Bullos. She had no proper running shoes to compete in her school race. She wrapped bandages around her feet and drew the Nike symbol upon them. Despite her poverty and limitations, she came forward, took part in the competition and completed the race with three golds.

Dear friends, we are called to come out from fear, silence, hopelessness and all the barriers that hold us back. Therefore, if I find myself in the position of the Canaanite woman, the question at this point is not simply, “Will you change?” but: “Will I have the courage to come out, raise my voice and persist in faith?”

The second group of characters in this story is the disciples.

After the continuous pleading and crying of the Canaanite woman, the disciples came to Jesus and urged him, “Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us.” They came with both a complaint and a solution. The people who challenge unjust systems, raise their voices for their rights, plead for help and persistently seek justice are often considered a disturbance.

Notice also that they were trying to tell Jesus what he should do: “Send her away.” They wanted God to act according to their own desire and for the sake of their own comfort. Perhaps their attitude was, I would say, in my version, ‘Her pain is not our pain. Her daughter’s suffering has nothing to do with us. Her problem is not our problem. Therefore, send her away and release us from this disturbance.’

How often do we also have this attitude? The important question is not, “How do we deal with the annoying people in our lives?” The question is: How do we respond when another person’s pain disturbs our comfort?

If I find myself in the position of the disciples, the question comes again: Will I change from silencing the voices that disturb my comfort to listening to their pain with compassion?

The third and final character in this story is Jesus. Jesus’ first response to the woman is silence. Matthew says, “He did not answer her at all.” But that silence could certainly have been experienced as avoidance and neglect. When the disciples urged Jesus to send her away, Jesus said, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”

Jesus appears to have clarity concerning the initial parameters of his mission. The Canaanite woman does not appear to be part of the target group of Jesus’ mission. But she comes closer and bows down before Jesus. In this posture of humility, she pleads once more with only three words: “Lord, help me!” When she persists, Jesus’ next response is even more disturbing: “It is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs.”

Many scholars, theologians and preachers have struggled with this hard saying of Jesus. Among these many interpretations, one perspective particularly caught my attention. Harriet Reed Congdon argues that it is the Canaanite woman who changes the direction of the whole conversation. The number three, at the end of every attempt, is the previous response that could normally have been the end of the story. Jesus’ third “no” to the woman is not the end of this story. The door appeared to be closed. But the woman discovers an opening even within the words of refusal: “Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.”

New Testament scholar Joanna Dewey reads, as I quote, “The narrative portrays Jesus being bested by a woman and changing his behaviour on that account. This is the only instance in the extant tradition of Jesus being taught by someone, and that someone is a woman who should not properly be speaking to him at all”.

In one sense, Jesus holds all the power in this encounter. He is male, Jewish and recognised by the woman as “Lord” and “Son of David.” The woman, by contrast, is a Gentile, a Canaanite and a woman. Her ethnicity, religion and gender marginalise her. Keeping all the divinity of Jesus, Jesus was teaching us how a person in power must change. The greatness of Jesus is not shown by refusing to listen because he possesses authority. It is shown in his willingness to remain in conversation, to hear the woman’s challenge and to allow mercy to cross the boundary.

This is a powerful lesson for everyone who holds authority. Power is not given only to rule, control or lead others. Responsible leadership also requires the humility to listen, reconsider and change when truth, justice and compassion demand it.

The three characters invite us to change. The Canaanite woman calls us to come out of suffering, fear and silence. The disciples challenge us to stop silencing those whose cries disturb our comfort. Jesus shows us that those who hold power must be willing to listen and change. If I find myself in the position of Jesus, holding power and authority, the question comes again: Will I change by listening with humility, reconsidering my position and allowing mercy to cross the boundaries?

Dear friends, where do we see ourselves in this story today? What change is God asking from us? Let this question ripple through our hearts and lives: Will you change? Amen.

Hymn StF 251 Jesus Christ is waiting

<https://youtu.be/Wqwzlel4-5E?si=cLiPwGz-TgRz8nQ>

Jesus Christ is waiting,
Waiting in the streets;
No one is his neighbour,
All alone he eats.
Listen, Lord Jesus,
I am lonely too.
Make me, friend or stranger,
Fit to wait on you

Jesus Christ is raging,
Raging in the streets,
Where injustice spirals
And real hope retreats.
Listen, Lord Jesus,
I am angry too.
In the Kingdom’s causes
Let me rage with you.

Jesus Christ is healing,
Healing in the streets;
Curing those who suffer,
Touching those he greets.
Listen, Lord Jesus,
I have pity too.
Let my care be active,
Healing just like you.

Jesus Christ is dancing,
Dancing in the streets,
Where each sign of hatred
He, with love, defeats.
Listen, Lord Jesus,
I should triumph too.

Where good conquers evil
Let me dance with you.
Jesus Christ is calling,
Calling in the streets,
"Who will join my journey?"

I will guide their feet."
Listen, Lord Jesus,
Let my fears be few.
Walk one step before me;
I will follow you.

Prayer of Intercession

Compassionate God, we bring to you our needs and the needs of your people in this special time of prayer. Loving God, Hear us and help us.

We pray for those who have come to believe that nothing can be changed. Lord, free them from hopelessness and renew them with courage, faith and hope. Loving God, *Hear us and help us.*

We pray for our friends and families who are longing and praying for change, perhaps in their health, finances or relationships. Give them strength, hope and guidance in all their struggles. Loving God, *Hear us and help us.*

We pray for our younger generation as they dream about their future and seek to build their lives. Give them vision, strong character and resilient hearts to embrace the truth and the love of Christ. Loving God, *Hear us and help us.*

We pray for the leaders of our Church and nations. As they hold the responsibility to serve and lead with authority and grace, give them your wisdom, humility and courage to make the changes needed for justice and peace. Loving God, *Hear us and help us.*

We pray for the mission and ministry of your Church, in which we are all your servants. May our worship, the works of your kingdom and our commitment to the community bring blessing and positive change to people and places. Loving God, *Hear us and help us.*

We pray for ourselves as we bring before you every need of our lives. Give us strength, peace, good health and courage to face each day with faith and hope. Loving God, *Hear us and help us.*

As we bring before you not only these prayers, but also our unspoken prayers and the whispered words of our hearts, we place them all before you through the prayer that Jesus taught us, as we pray:

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, for ever and ever. Amen.

Hymn: StF 707 Make me a channel of your peace <https://youtu.be/vGRCdax2Eqk?si=xEZ0ZmdovJ5iQdjZ>

Make me a channel of your peace:
Where there is hatred, let me bring your love;
where there is injury, your healing power,
and where there's doubt, true faith in you.

O, Spirit, grant that I may never seek
so much to be consoled as to console,
to be understood as to understand,
to be loved as to love with all my soul.

Make me a channel of your peace:
where there's despair in life let me bring hope;
Where there is darkness, only light,
and where there's sadness, ever joy.

Make me a channel of your peace:
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
in giving to all that we receive,
and in dying that we're born to eternal life.

Blessing : May the grace of God the Father, who draws all people into his embrace, lead us on our way. May the love of Christ, who challenges us to change, shine through our words and works. May the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, who guides us into the future, give us courage to live with faith, hope and love. And may the blessing of the Triune God be with us and remain with us always. Amen.