

Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost

THE SHOUT OF FAITH!

Matthew 15:21-28

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Analysis by Michael Hoy

21Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. 22Just 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." 23But he did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, "Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us." 24He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." 25But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me." 26He answered, "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." 27She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." 28Then Jesus answered her, "Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish." And her daughter was healed instantly.

DIAGNOSIS: All that Shouting!

Step One: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) – *Tormented*

As much as the daughter of this desperate woman has a tormenting problem, she is not the focus of this story. It is the Canaanite woman herself, who is likewise tormented. We should see that she is oppressed in many ways. She is a foreigner, a pagan, a woman, part of a culture that has been known for its hostility toward

Jewish monotheism. And while her daughter suffers, she suffers. She has more than three strikes against her. In her tormented state, she vents-loudly; so much so that the disciples are themselves tormented just having her around. (Might we, the church, have also become calloused to those shouting about the torments of the world? [Or to those silenced by fatigue?] Have we also become deaf to our own torments?)

Step Two: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) – Denied

As if it is not enough to be tormented so, the Canaanite woman really can't get a hearing, no matter how much she shouts. Jesus gives her no answer at all, even when she uses all the theologically right invocations for his assistance. Even the disciples are not really interested in helping her when they supposedly appeal on her behalf to Jesus. They just want her quieted. Better just to help her so she will stop "shouting after us." Given such responses, might some who pray for help eventually conclude that they are beyond help? Or, equally as bad, worthy of being denied? When we think ourselves beyond help and deniable, our torment can turn to unfaith.

Step Three: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) – Truly Lost

As much as Jesus' silence toward her clearly defines her as outsider, that condition is only exacerbated when Jesus finally does speak to her. His words describe his mission as for other people, not for this woman: "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel," he says. And when she takes even these words of acknowledgment beyond the silence she first received, and begs for help, she gets the final blow: "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs."

Try not to soften this hard word from Jesus by speaking about puppies. The real point is in the first words of Jesus, explaining how fairness works ("it is not fair"). According to the Law of God, some are favored and others are not. God sets

the standards, and the standards exclude those who do not keep the Law perfectly. But those who pin their hopes on that fairness may find that fairness won't get you what you want. It will only confirm our sorry, lost state before God. There is much to be said about this in an age where many are "shouting" for rights, vindication against terrorists, and various other torments of life or situations of lostness. Far fewer voices are crying out in repentance. (Note: Even for those oppressed, as this woman surely is, we should not separate justice from the fairness of the Law. Yet justness/fairness is finally determined by God's standards; and under that measure, it is not only oppressors who are called to account-to be sure, they are to be held accountable, fairly, justly, usually sooner than they think-but the oppressed as well who can only see themselves as victims. In other words, when the oppressors finally get their due, even that is not an occasion of great and final joy for the oppressed, for that would make them the same as those who tormented them. The best liberation theologians-as Jesus' surely is-realize that liberation needs to be not only for the oppressed but for the oppressors as well; we are, universally, in bondage to sin.)

PROGNOSIS: Shouting for All!

Step Four: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) – *Getting Lost for Us So That We Get Mercy*

However much Jesus satisfies the lost of Israel, he is also universal enough to include this woman geographically, temporally, and even in his way of addressing her. That much God also does under the Law. But the question is begged by Jesus' real, bodily presence here: What's a good Jewish boy like you doing in a place like this? (This tormented, lost world.) Is Jesus lost? Indeed, he is, and for us. He is willing to risk that lostness, and it will take him to foreign lands, to socially outcast and pagan peoples, to enemies of God... to die

for such as these, so that they might come to have his universal embrace of what those sorely oppressed need, what they even shout for: mercy.

Step Five: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) – Great Faith

The woman, for all the truth of her lostness, which she accepts, counting herself “a dog” in the eyes of God’s just and fair Law, trusts where her bread is buttered. “Yes, Lord,” she accepts in repentance, “yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from the master’s table.” Even a crumb of Jesus’ mercy is enough to satisfy the hungry soul in all the dog-days of life and death. Even a crumb of faith that risks all in Jesus, pinning all hopes of being fed on this One who was crucified into our lostness. Yet Jesus’ pronouncement is one of greatness for those who trust in him: “Woman, great is your faith!” She need not hide under the table, but sit right with him.

Step Six: Final Prognosis (External Solution) – Healed

This faith brings great rewards, giving us the fullness of Jesus’ mercy and righteousness. It also brings healing to those for whom we so petition, trusting in his name. “Let it be done for you as you wish.” The woman found healing for herself and for her daughter. Joy now fills the home, casting out demons, restoring the order of Jesus’ new righteousness. There is more of Jesus’ universal healing to go around for the rest of the world, in all its lost, tormented state. Spread the Feast! Mercy and healing abounds! I can hear her shouting from here!