

When God goes Silent
Matt. 15:21-28
8/16 2020

It has happened to you before hasn't it? You found yourself in one of life's great struggles, and it brought you to your knees in prayer. You poured out your heart to the Lord. You earnestly pleaded with him for relief. But in return, all you got was silence. The Lord was silent.

You had heard those hope-filled words of Jesus concerning prayer: "Ask anything in my name and I will bring it to pass." You've read the scriptures and learned of various faithful people in the past who by prayer were the recipients of great blessings from above. You have even met other Christians who are more than happy to relate the wonderful answers to prayer they've had in their lives. And instead of encouraging you, it isolates you.

You wonder "Perhaps I'm a special case." "Perhaps God simply does not answer me." You are tempted to retreat from prayer; perhaps you already have.

But I would ask you to reconsider. You are not as unique as you might think. You are not the only one who has experienced the silence of God. David often complained about it in his Psalms. There are times, when God offers nothing but silence in his response to our prayers, but you can be sure the silence always has a purpose.

The text for today is Matt. 15:21-28 wherein we hear of a Canaanite woman who had a most pressing problem. It was her daughter, who was suffering terribly with demons of all things. There is perhaps nothing more frightening than to see someone tormented in this way. And this was her daughter. Like all mothers, she was used to making things better for her child, but with this, she was powerless. And so she cried out to Jesus "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David"

Jesus heard her, but did not answer her. There was only silence. Jesus seems so cold, aloof even. But we know better. This is the same Jesus who wept over sinful Jerusalem; the same Jesus who as he was being nailed on the cross said "father forgive them"; The same Jesus who willingly laid down his life for us. We have no valid reason to think ill of him because we

know him. Knowing him, as we do, we can only assume that he had a higher and more merciful purpose in mind. But what is that higher, and more merciful purpose? Let's find out.

The woman was not deterred by his initial silence. She was persistent in our pleading. But her persistence would only lead to an even stronger rejection. Initially he only answered her with silence, but now he was going to answer her with words which seemed unkind.

First he said "I was only sent for the lost sheep of the House of Israel." And as she kept pleading with him he said "It's right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs!" Now again, from the outside, Jesus seems cruel. He's talking Jews used to talk about canaanites.

But in this we see the higher and more merciful purpose that I talked about. This woman approached Jesus with a request for help on behalf of her daughter. And while Jesus was concerned for the daughter, as we shall see, he was also concerned about the woman who was making the request. He was concerned about her faith; about her eternal soul and her relationship with God.

That's the way it often is with prayer. When we pray, the thing we ask for is not only thing the Lord is concerned about. We may sometimes wish that it were like that. It would be so much simpler for us to just dash off a prayer and get what we want from him and be done with it....a simple business transaction.

But to God it is never a simple business transaction. He is not some anonymous clerk at the checkout at the supermarket of mercy. No No No! He wants more than that. He want's you! He want's me! He seeks a personal relationship with each of us.

Unfortunately, that is not always what we want. The sinful world around us, and our own sinful nature urges us to reject the idea that we even need God. It's no small coincidence that if people decide to depart from God they often do it at the same time that they depart from the home of their parents. It's an authority thing. I don't need my parents, I don't need God, I'm in charge of my own life now, thank you very much. But it's only a dream.

No one grows out of their need for God. So God will sometimes try to snap us out of that kind of thinking. He'll bring us down to the dogs so that we might begin to see how much we

actually need him. Those who are proud and strutting about do not believe they need mercy. Only those who are brought to their knees come to understand. Before we can be lifted up, we must be humbled.

So what do you do when the Lord humbles you? The woman could have become very indignant, walking away saying "Well... I never!" That's what many people do when the law of God begins to accuse.... they walk away. But not this woman, she receives his judgment and confesses it. "Yes, Gentile dog I may be, but at least the dogs get to eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." She uses Jesus own words and holds him to it. "But dogs get the crumbs!" She says, knowing that the crumbs that fall from Jesus' table are the rich crumbs of the Bread of Life.

Our Lord loves it when we engage him with all of ourselves, our heart, our mind, our wit even. That's what prayer should be: engaging God with your heart and your mind and you soul. That's what this woman did. In reply Jesus said, "You got great faith! Be it done for you as you desire." And her daughter was healed that instant.

Her faith was great on a couple of levels. First, no matter how many times she was rebuffed, she still believed that Jesus would help her. And Second, way before the Apostle Paul would come out and say that Salvation in Jesus was also for the gentiles, something he called a great mystery, long before that, this woman understood that by faith..

Truth is, God's Law actually calls us something far worse than "dogs." It calls us sinners. And all we can say is "Yes, that's me, I'm a sinner," but Jesus died for sinners. To have faith is to be given to by God. On his terms. Not yours. And in faith you will not only eat the crumbs that fall from his table as little dogs do, but you will have a place reserved for you at God's table as one of his children and sitting across from us will be that Canaanite woman and her daughter!

When heaven grows silent to your prayers, do not impugn God's motives, But rather, humble yourselves under God's mighty hand, and he will lift you up at the proper time. AMEN