

Sermon Matthew 15 21 28 9th S af Pent 2011

Sermon: 9th Sunday after Pentecost

Text: Matthew 15:21-28 – The Canaanite Women

Theme: Christ doesn't despise anybody

Goal: “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved!”

Dear Friends,

Introduction: In this text we have here what seems to be a clear case of racism and discrimination. Jesus was not “politically correct” (as we say today). He expressed the thought of the Jews against the foreign: They were Gentiles, outside God's promises, compared to “dogs”.

Was Jesus a racist? What can we learn from that story?

I - The scenario

Jesus was ministering in the north of the country. He crossed the border, to what we call now Lebanon. Canaanites used to live in all that area, including Israel in the past, and they were displaced by the Israelite when they conquered the Promised Land – Canaan - under the leadership of Joshua. God had condemned those people because of their idolatry and they were enemies of Israel. Many remnants were still living outside Israel's border. The Prophet Elijah was hosted by a widow from that region when he was persecuted by the King. - They were Gentiles, and their religion had led God's people to idolatry and paganism several times in the Old Testament time. One of Solomon's wives was a princess from Sidon and she asked Solomon to build a temple to her god in Jerusalem...

Now, it seems that the reverse was happening. The Good News about Jesus was crossing the frontiers and many Canaanites heard about His miracles and His teaching. Some of them knew about the Hope of Israel. May this Man of Nazareth be the Promised One?

And so that Canaanite woman had heard about Jesus as well and came to intercede on behalf of her daughter, who was very ill.

II – The persistent prayer

A) The first cry: The woman approached Jesus in the right way. She cried out: “Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me!” And she was crying and crying, following Jesus and the crowd.

To call Jesus as “Lord” is to recognize that He is the same God of the Old Testament, which had promised to come to His people. We studied in the Bible Study last Wednesday what it means to confess: “Jesus is Lord!” This was the very first confession of faith of the first Christians, before they had a full Creed like we have now. The woman recognized that Jesus was not only a powerful man, a big prophet, but that He was really the LORD! She didn't trust in other gods anymore, but her trust was laid on Jesus alone!

When she called out “Lord, Son of David”, this linked Jesus to all the Old Testament prophecies. How much did that woman know about the OT prophecies? But she knew enough to identify Jesus as the Promised One and she believed so!

To ask “have mercy on me” shows how desperate she was and that no one else could help her. She was helpless and her only hope was the mercy of God, who she recognized in Jesus: “Have mercy on me!”

In spite of that powerful prayer, “Jesus did not answer a word”. He kept going His way with His disciples and the crowd. It's difficult to understand that attitude of Jesus. He was always kind with people who were looking for Him... - Do you sometimes feel that there is no answer to your prayers? Does it seem that God is quiet? Silent? - Learn from that woman to be persistent in your prayer!

B) The second cry: an intercession. As she kept crying out, the “disciples came to Jesus and urged Him”, interceding on her behalf. But they were not really interested in helping her, but they felt bothered with her cry. They simply said: “Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us.” And now we have an answer of Jesus, a very strange answer: “I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.”

The disciples were of the same opinion. Jesus belonged to them only, to the Jews. They couldn't mix with Gentiles, with people of other races, who were impure, according to the Jewish Law.

Was Jesus really honest when He answered that way? Was He despising the foreign woman?

C) The third cry: finally the woman managed to approach Jesus. And she fell on her knees before Him and said: “Lord, help me!” She deeply humbled herself and fell down onto the dust of the road, crying for help. Imagine that scene... And Jesus was not even touched in His heart! (or: it seems so...) He seemed to be rude with her and answered: “It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs.” - The Israelites were the children of God; the Gentiles were the dogs! Wow! What a hard answer! If it had been me, I think I would have turned away, very frustrated with Jesus...

Does Jesus hear our cry always at the very first time? Not at all. And we look to others and we see that they are receiving special blessings, and we are not... Frustration? Deception? What is God intending to do with us?

D) Fourth cry: But the woman didn't give up. She was not discouraged. She accepted her position as a foreign, as a “dog” in the eyes of the Jews. She knew that she was not worthy of anything. But she looked to Jesus and said: “Yes, Lord, but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table.” - She didn't want a full loaf of bread; only

some crumbs would have satisfied her...

And Jesus praised her faith! “Woman, you have a great faith! Your request is granted!” - And her daughter was healed that very hour! Praise the Lord!

III- The lesson:

I don't think that Jesus was really honest with Himself in His reaction to that woman; I think He wanted to test her faith and to show to the disciples that He came for all and that He did not despise anyone who came to Him in true faith. He had already helped other foreigners, as the Centurion of Capharnaum, a Roman. And He broke all barriers of race, culture, traditions, language when he sent the disciples to go to all the peoples and to make disciples of all nations. Thanks God, because we are included in these and were accepted by Jesus. His blood was shed on the cross for all, and not only for the Jews or for other specific people. “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved”, like that woman was saved and we are saved.

Conclusion: In our Service, we act like that woman: We come to God as foreigners and unworthy sinners at the beginning of the Service, confessing our sins and asking for mercy. - We sing three times, persistent: Lord, have mercy, Christ, have mercy, Lord, have mercy. - We confess that Jesus Christ is our Lord in the Glory in Excelsis and in the Creed. - In the Offertory, we insist: “Cast me not away from your presence...” - In the Sanctus we “bless He who comes in the name of the Lord”. - And humbly we sing just before the Lord Supper: “Lamb of God, who takes the sin of the world, have mercy on us... have mercy on us... grant us peace.” - This is to persist in faith and in prayer. And as Jesus finally heard the cry of that woman, we can be sure that He hears our persistent cry as well and dismisses us with His blessing. And we go in peace back to our home. Amen.

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Cape Town, 14 August 2011