

**Sunday, August 20, 2017 – Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost**  
**“Is Jesus for Everyone?”**

Matthew 15: 21-28

Rev. Derek S. Klemm, Mountain View Lutheran Church, Las Vegas, NV  
Structure: Question Answered

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

“Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me!” A desperate woman called out to an out of place Jesus who had crossed the line into a foreign land. “My daughter is suffering terribly from demon-possession!” He’d done it for many others – you know, healed them. And though she’s standing right there, though Jesus has nothing else to do at that moment, he will not heal her. Jesus does not say, “No, I’m sorry. Initially, he does not answer her at all. In fact, you get the distinct impression that besides Jesus and his entourage, this woman is the only other person around and she follows, begging for Jesus to heal her poor daughter.

If you’re troubled by Jesus, you’re not alone. You almost have to ask – do I know you? Of course, in the end He does heal this girl but here Jesus, it seems, is not Himself. Is this the same Jesus who said, “Let the little children come to me,” “Let he who is without sin cast the first stone,” or “Go and make disciples of all nations?” No time to answer? No compassion? Jesus, “Do we know you?”

This scene raises an important questions for us – perhaps we wonder if there are times Jesus just doesn’t have time to deal with our problems. We’re going to consider just one question today – **“Is Jesus really for everyone?”**

One answer to the question, “Is Jesus really for everyone?” Is to answer - yes, He came for everyone, but not right away. There’s a pecking order – and to this point, Jesus has come only for the people of Israel. Israel is privileged. Maybe some people are just more important to God.

There’s a common teaching that people of the bloodline of Israel don’t need Jesus in the same way you and I do. To this way of thinking, if you’re Jewish whether you believe in Jesus or not, it does not matter – salvation is automatic because you’re one of God’s chosen people. After all, did God not make a promise to Abraham, and to David? God lets Gentiles in by believing in Jesus but right now Jesus’ priority is ministering to Israel. He ignores this Canaanite because He had better things to do.

What do you think? Are some people more special than others to God? Do you have extra favor based on your nationality, or your family, or something you've done to please God? A similar ideology drives white supremacists toward the lie that they are superior, chosen, special. Such attitudes always lead to loss of compassion and abuse of our neighbor and need to be spoken up against by the church.

Moreover, if there are some who are saved automatically and some who must believe, then perhaps there are some who don't believe who can find a relationship with God in some other way, a third or fourth path. After all, there are so many people in our world who don't believe Jesus is Lord. I'm sure you know many of them – and it's strange to think, isn't it, that many of these honest, good, hardworking people who care about their families, are productive members of society... well, God would overlook their unbelief, wouldn't He?

Jesus does say He was sent for the lost sheep of Israel – but there is no doubt from the text right before our reading that Jesus' key word is "lost." Jesus says this about some people of the bloodline: "Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be pulled up by the roots." There is no bloodline, no status and no good work that can make us acceptable in God's sight. Jesus says, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life – no one comes to the Father but by Me." It may be tempting to think some people have special favor, whether it's something earned by being really good or something they have by status – but that is not so with God. It's not this woman's Canaanite blood that stops Jesus from acknowledging her at first.

Another reasonable explanation is that Jesus is merely testing this woman's faith. There are many reasons He might do this – to see how much she trusts Him, or maybe to use her as an object lesson to the disciples, to show them that what really matters is what comes from the inside of a person's heart – and He must test her to prove it. In other words – Yes, Jesus came for everyone – everyone who is able to pass the test.

That's a common way to think about God – when bad things happen, God is testing our belief in Him. It is easy to understand why – we have to prove our loyalty in every other part of life. If you want a promotion at work, prove you're willing to make sacrifices. Along the way, you'll be evaluated for how you do under pressure – and performance reviews give us our

grade. Before that, we had tests in school, to prove what we learned. If you want trust in a relationship, you have to earn it. Life is full of testing.

The problem is when you talk this way about God, you end up in some really hard places. A man comes down with cancer and wonders – “is God testing me?” A couple suffers a miscarriage and wonders, “Is God punishing us?” If you’ve ever wondered, “God, what did I do to deserve this?!” if you’ve ever been overcome by shame for thinking that you have to prove yourself to Him, if you’ve ever felt overwhelmed by the enormity of trying to make God happy, then you know there is something very uncaring, and even cruel about a God who treats your faith like a fraternity or sorority pledge. Jump through hoops, endure pain, humiliate yourself, prove your love.

Yes, the Christian life does mean taking up our cross and suffering for Christ’s sake, but not to prove how much we love God. We can never love Him enough. That’s why Jesus came, why He died and rose – to free us from guilt, shame and the curse of sin to live freely in the joy that comes that comes as God loves you. To that question – “Is Jesus for everyone?” We can’t say He was merely testing this woman’s faith. There must be some other reason He first refused her and then gave her His gift of love.

There is another answer to our question – “Is Jesus for everyone?” It is not that the Canaanite woman is a lower priority because of her social status, or that Jesus was testing her faith. The answer that rises from Scripture and is rooted in God’s grace and love is this: Yes, Jesus is for everyone – every nation, tribe, language and tongue – but He doesn’t take people on their own terms. He comes in order to make all people part of Israel. What is Israel? Not a land, not a bloodline – Israel is all who trust in the one God sent, Jesus Christ as their Savior. Jesus does not take us on our own terms – He is for everyone because He wants absorb everyone into Israel by making us one with Himself.

Journey with me a few chapters back, to Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount. He says, “Do not give dogs what is sacred – do not throw your pearls to pigs.” He goes on to speak about false prophets saying, “Not everyone who says to me, “Lord, Lord” will enter the kingdom of heaven” but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.” And what is the Father’s will? That we lay our sins before Jesus in humility, ask God’s forgiveness and with His help, live every

more as the new creation we are made to be. So when Jesus sees a woman wailing from a people who worship false gods, crying out “Lord, Lord” and asking for a blessing that is intended for all who confess their sin and depend on Jesus for their salvation. God’s blessings, God’s word of forgiveness is a word spoken to those who trust in Him and lay their sin before Him. But this woman’s life, her faith has been rooted not in trusting Jesus. To honor a request from someone asking on their own terms, just looking for a miracle healing without the obedience that comes from living under Jesus – would be the same as a person unfaithful in their marriage coming to me in confession and saying, “Yes, pastor, I’m having an affair. Forgive me,” and yet they’re not going to stop. God’s grace is for the humble, the repentant – to throw forgiveness, to throw acts of mercy at anyone who is not repentant and living outside of God’s grace is like throwing the children’s bread to the dogs, or pearls before swine.

So what’s the change?” Why does Jesus bless this woman? He blesses her as she is absorbed into Israel. Her confession shows it – she knows even a scrap of blessing from Jesus is enough to fill her soul. That’s the same naïve trust to think that God makes promises through the sprinkling of water, or comes to us through a thin wafer and sip of wine, and that God actually works through such things to actually do stuff, stuff like forgive sins and give eternal life and mysteriously bond us together as one. Jesus, at first seeming to keep to a racial stereotype about Canaanites then transcends the culture to show that He comes to give forgiveness and mercy to everyone.

Is God for everyone? Yes – and thank God that you, and me, and this Canaanite woman, and our nation left reeling and divided after a white supremacist march in Virginia can rejoice that God has worked on our hearts to believe and trust that Jesus is Lord. He is Israel and He absorbs us into Himself. May God bless you as you share that joy and love with everyone so that they too may believe that even crumbs from the hand of Jesus are more than enough to fill their souls. In Jesus’ name, Amen.