

Sermon for the Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost

“It is not right to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs.”

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It seems cruel, to call a foreigner a dog for the simple fact of them being from a strange land. How could the Christ, the God of love, speak so unkindly?

She, a gentile, a Canaanite, asks for mercy on behalf of her daughter, who is possessed by a demon. The Lord rebukes her. Why?

The woman is indeed from a strange land. The land that founded Tyre and Sidon. The land that would found Carthage. A land of great prosperity, of trade, commerce, and power. A land that gained such wealth, or so they believed, from hard work, adventure, bravery, and blood.

Blood, it must be said, for human sacrifice was the center of Canaanite piety; the belief that by shedding human blood, money would be their compensation.

And it is not the blood of just any person. But the blood of one’s own child. To kill one’s child for the sake of gaining wealth was the way of life for the Canaanite. It is no wonder that the Lord seems to have little interest in healing the daughter of a woman who damns her own children.

Imagine setting your own child upon a bronze pot set on fire over the hands of an idol of Molech. Would you not know that in doing so, you are accomplishing evil? It is no surprise then that this woman is cursed by the Christ as a dog, for dogs, too, devour things that have died.

The daughter is indeed demon possessed, for she is incarcerated in the kingdom of Satan, there to do his bidding, and be his sacrifice. So it is with all who are damned by their worship of the things of this world.

So it is with all gentiles. So it is with us, who have never known the face of God, but only the things that worry us from day to day.

Indeed it is our fear that causes us to worship worldly things; to check our bank account and our investments with regularity; to check the news every day to see what evil is befalling the world; to wonder what our friends think. It is such petty fears that drive all of us gentiles, we who do not fear God. It is what compels this woman's pleas for mercy, for fear of losing her daughter, the child of a gentile, the offspring of all who are born into sin, for the fear of losing us, all of us, this sinful race.

Truly, all of us are daughters of this Canaanite woman, knowing no God, and living in fear of the Father of Lies, as our ancestors did for a hundred generations.

Placing ourselves under created things, we became idolators, no longer reigning over creation, but being ruled over by that which is not the image of God. We degraded ourselves, submitting to that which is below us, becoming slaves to those things which Adam once ruled over, giving them names. And so we are no better than the beasts. Christ is not wrong, nor is He cruel in calling us dogs, for dogs are animals that loyally serve their master, and we have in fact become animals, and we serve our master, the devil.

So the Lord rebukes the woman. *'It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs.'*

Yet the woman will not relent, this gentile, the mother of us all. She pleads for mercy. She pleads for a miracle. And she confesses her sin, for she calls herself a dog.

The Lord looks to her. He seems surprised, for a woman of Canaan has condemned herself as an unthinking beast. He looks to her and immediately says *'Oh Woman, great is your faith.'* For faith follows repentance; and where there is sorrow for sin, there is the promise of forgiveness.

The woman's daughter is exorcized, by the word and will of Christ. And she who hungered and thirsted after righteousness was made full. For she sought the Manna from heaven, the water born of the rock. And *what she sought, she did find.*

Why would she not be? It was Christ that left Judea, and came to the land of the gentiles.

Thirst for such blessed water, O Christian. Starve in search of the bread of life, you baptized. For such water is found in the Church, and such bread upon the altar of every sacred sanctuary. This is what is offered you. The Lord who calls you a dog, the Lord who mocks your fallenness. Do you think that He condemns your godlessness out of malice? Or is your daughter but a moment from being cleansed?

Eat of the feast of the Lord, for though this bread is not for beasts such as us, yet even we may eat of the crumbs that fall from the master's table. Even as we drink the blood that falls from His side from the tree. The blood that waters the world.

Come then, and beseech the Lord, you daughters of Canaan. Be purged of the devil, you children of the nations. Receive the crumb, for it is the body of Christ. Receive His cup, for in it is life.

Receives these things, you lost, and understand that:

*'The Lord God,
who gathers the outcasts of Israel, declares,
"I will gather yet others to him
besides those already gathered."*

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Preached by Pastor Fields

Sermon Texts: Isaiah 56:1, 6-8; Romans 11:1-2, 13-15, 28-32; Matthew 15:21-28.