

# The Argument of Faith

**ELEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**, Proper 15[a] August 20, 2017

## **MATTHEW 15:21-28**

<sup>21</sup> **And Jesus went away from there and withdrew to the district of Tyre and Sidon.** <sup>22</sup> **And behold, a Canaanite woman from that region came out and was crying, “Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon.”** <sup>23</sup> **But he did not answer her a word. And his disciples came and begged him, saying, “Send her away, for she is crying out after us.”** <sup>24</sup> **He answered, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”** <sup>25</sup> **But she came and knelt before him, saying, “Lord, help me.”** <sup>26</sup> **And he answered, “It is not right to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs.”** <sup>27</sup> **She said, “Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.”** <sup>28</sup> **Then Jesus answered her, “O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire.” And her daughter was healed instantly.**

## **IN THE NAME OF JESUS.**

Faith holds onto Jesus and won't let go. Faith sees everything that would testify against a gracious God, and faith turns to Jesus, and won't let go. Faith hears the holy Law which convicts the sinner—always convicts and tears down the sinner—and hearing that which divides the sinner from holy God, faith clings to God anyway, clings to God even more, and won't let go.

Faith hears God say, *I am holy, you must be holy* [cf. 1 Peter 1:15], and hears God say, *every person, every one of you, is a liar* [Psalm 116], and hears God say, *I am a jealous God and a consuming fire* [Deuteronomy 4:24], and to God, faith says, *No. This cannot be. I must have you as a gracious God. If you are my Lord, you must be my Lord because you are forgiving, because you are gracious to those lost in death, because you see the sinner, and instead of casting into Hell with the hammer of the Law, you call the sinner to yourself, you bind yourself to the sinner with your Name, and you save.*

Faith argues with God: *If you, O God, are to be my Lord and have me as your own, you must save me, you must justify me, for I can do it myself not at all, and if you don't make me your own, I will never be yours.*

Faith makes an argument. Against God, against his accusation of the Law, against his abandonment of

the sinner, faith argues grace. And God wants to hear this argument.

So the Canaanite woman approaches Jesus. She shouldn't have been doing even that. She is a Canaanite woman, she's not even allowed into the Jerusalem Temple, she eats unclean food and lives with unclean people and eats and drinks with them. So for her to present herself to Jesus, while knowing that Jesus is Lord, and that Jesus is the Son of David, that is, the King of Israel, is already for her to start the argument.

She shouldn't have been there, the holy Apostles want her gone, but there she is:

**“Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David, my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon.”**

[Matthew 15:22]

Jesus gives no answer. The disciples had an answer:

**“Send her away, for she is crying out after us.”**

[Matthew 15:23]

Then Jesus: **“I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”**

That should've ended it. He was sent for the sheep of Israel, he's God in the flesh, his Word created the universe, and his word should be considered final.

But she didn't take it as final. Three short words she says. Matthew 15:25:

**“Lord, help me.”**

Jesus answered:

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

Did Jesus just call her a dog? Is that not enough to finally get her to walk away? But she won't give up the argument:

**“Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table.”**

The argument of faith. This woman just won't let go of the Lord. Even over against everything in front of her, she still holds to him. Matthew 15:28:

<sup>28</sup> **Then Jesus answered her, “O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire.”**

She has faith in a great thing. Her faith is not great because it is so strong, stronger than anyone else's. It's great because it is holding on to a great thing.

She has faith in a Lord who is merciful.

She has faith that even when she hears the Law of God condemning her, she nevertheless will not let him go until she has him for his forgiveness.

She has faith that even when everything in her world is going wrong, even when her daughter is oppressed by demons, when the holy Apostles want to cast her out, when the Lord says he came only for the lost sheep of Israel, she will still hold onto him until he blesses her.

Faith argues with God.

Faith hears God say, *I, the Lord your God, am holy, you must be holy*, and faith does not look to its own works, but the greater thing, to God himself, and says, *Lord, if I am going to be holy, it will be because you make me holy. So Lord, make me holy, as you have promised in the washing of Baptism.*

Faith hears God say, *Every one of you is a liar*, and faith argues, *If I, O Lord, am going to be accounted*

*not a liar but as honorable, if I am going to stand before you worthy, it will be because you justify me, and by your Word of Gospel, you declare me to be righteous and worthy for the sake of your own blood. So Lord, let me drink your blood according to your promise for the forgiveness of all my sin.*

Faith hears God say, *I am a jealous God and a consuming fire*, and faith says, *No, Lord, to me you cannot be a consuming fire. For you have made me your own. I must have you as a gracious God, and I will hold onto you daily for the forgiveness of my sin, for the comfort of your grace, for the gift of life everlasting.*

Faith argues with God. It is the argument God rejoices in. He gave us the argument. He put it on our lips when he said he is our God and we are his people, and we are to call upon him.

It is not an argument of arrogance, as if we could bully God into doing what we want. It is not an argument meant to avoid the question and confuse, as we might be accustomed to here on Earth.

But it is the argument of faith. The argument of holding onto God even against God. Of saying to him, *I have heard your Law, and it has covered me in shame, but I will not let you go until I hear your Gospel, so I can stand before you in honor.*

*I have heard your holiness, and it leaves me shaking in fear, but I will not let you go until I hear your word of grace cleansing me to make me holy.*

It is the argument of an unclean Canaanite woman saying to Jesus, *I must have you as my Lord, even if it's only the crumbs from your table. For your Table is life, and if I am eating from your Table, I lack nothing.*

Faith holds onto Jesus and will not let go.

Where we find ourselves letting go, where we find ourselves trying to justify self, that's not faith, but it's our sinful flesh.

Of the sinful flesh, we daily repent, turning to the Lord to say, *Forgive me. Have mercy on me, O Lord.* And daily, then, the life of faith holds onto the Lord for that forgiveness, rejoicing that he came for the lost sheep of Israel, and he has called us, along with that Canaanite woman, into his Israel.

And now we rejoice in being his Israel.

Where the Law taught us who should be thrown out of Israel, as the Apostles throwing out the Canaanite woman; where the Law had us judging one another, causing division; where the Law had us living in fear, not knowing how we could ever justify ourselves, by his Gospel, Jesus has called us into his Israel. By his Gospel, he binds us together, so that we are now brothers and sisters in Christ, given to look not at how to exclude one another for our sin, but at how to bestow the gifts of Jesus, to speak his comfort, to reconcile in forgiveness, to encourage and build up, calling no one a Canaanite, but embracing one another as those belonging to him who was sent to the lost sheep of Israel, embracing one another, that is, as those who belong to Christ.

**IN THE NAME OF JESUS.**