

Have you ever met a mother who would do anything to help her child? We meet a mom like that in today’s Gospel reading. Her daughter has a horrible problem, and this mother has an excellent idea about where to go for help.

Now, a couple details about her. She is a Canaanite, and the Canaanites were ancient enemies of the Israelites. She is as far from being part of the “in” crowd as you can get. And yet somewhere along the way she has heard about this Jesus, and she’s heard enough to believe that He can help her daughter. What’s more, she’s heard enough that when she finally comes face to face with Jesus, she addresses Him as “Lord, Son of David.” That means she is linking Jesus to the prophecies about the coming Messiah. In other words, she gets it. She “gets” who Jesus is, and she believes that He has the power to help her. She believes that Jesus is for everyone, even Canaanite women. But is He?

It’s hard to tell at first, to be candid. His disciples try to get rid of her. Her persistence is causing a commotion and is making them feel uncomfortable; besides, she is not part of their race or religion. But this mom keeps it up. She follows them around. She’s making a scene, and she’s making it for the sake of her daughter, and she’s not letting go of this because she knows who Jesus is and what He can do. What she has heard about Jesus and what she knows deep down is that He is for everyone, even Canaanite women and their children. But is He really?

The disciples wish she would just go away. And after Jesus seems to ignore her for a while, this is what he says: “I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.” This is a decisive moment, a moment at which some might’ve given up hope. But there is something propelling this mom forward. Abandoning all pride, she throws herself to the ground and kneels before Jesus, pleading, “Lord, help me.” And if I were writing a screenplay, this is the point where the music would swell, and a ray of light would break through the clouds, and Jesus would take this woman by the hand and make everything better.

But instead, Jesus says something shocking. He says that it is not right to take the food meant for the children and throw it to the dogs. Now, the word Jesus uses for “dogs” could be interpreted as “puppies,” but still. If Jesus was a pastor and he said this to a church member, His name would be on a bunch of call lists the next day. If the Canaanite woman was easily offended, she would have all the ammunition she needed right here to go into a full-scale rant. But here’s the thing: She’s not coming to Jesus with the attitude that He owes her something. Look at what she says! She says to Jesus, “I would be happy with your scraps. The crumbs from your table would be enough for me.”

Now, it's the disciples' turn to be shocked, as their Teacher praises the woman for her great faith and grants her request, healing her daughter at once. This whole exchange between the Canaanite woman and Jesus actually boomerangs back on His disciples. Without having to say anything to them directly, the message was sent: "I am for everyone, even Canaanite women. I am for everyone who believes in Me and what I can do. It's not about gender, it's not about race, it's not about class, it's not about social status, it's about faith in Me. That's it. Do you have it? It's the only thing that matters." Do you see how applicable the message of Jesus is to us—and to our nation at this moment in time?

In making her request, the Canaanite woman focused on Jesus, not herself. Because she focused on Jesus, she remained persistent in her plea for help, because she believed that Jesus had the ability and power to change things. She remained persistent, she kept on coming, even when it seemed to be getting her nowhere. As we saw, Jesus did not respond to her cries immediately. Then, when He did respond, it was discouraging—at first.

If you've been a Christian for any amount of time at all, then you know how it feels to pray and sense no immediate change. You know what it's like to pray for God's help and then to have even more discouraging news come your way. When that happens, people give up or get mad; I've seen it happen. I've been that person. But the Canaanite mother shows us another option. Simply put, that other option is to be faithfully stubborn.

Do you understand what I mean when I say, "faithfully stubborn?" Look at that mom one more time. She's heard what Jesus can do. She's heard what He is like. She'd be happy with any leftover help He could provide because it came from Him. No disciple is going to get in her way. And when Jesus tests her with these little verbal jabs, she passes, because she is faithfully stubborn. She won't let go of Jesus. Nothing turns her away from the thought that He is for her. In response, Jesus brings great blessing into her life. He gives what she asks; and she already has everything she needs: great faith in a great God.

Let me encourage you today to be faithfully stubborn with God. Hold Him to the promises He has made to you; appeal to Him not on the basis of who you are but on who He is. Be persistent when there's only silence or more bad news, because you know, deep down, He is merciful—and because you know His ways are mysterious. Trust in the purpose and will of God. Don't let go of Jesus. Revisit and remember His cross; His agony; His suffering and death. There, at the cross, it is so clear: Jesus is for everyone, including you.