

Title: “The Goodness of the Lord”

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Matthew 15:26-27

8/20/2023

Service Readings: Is. 56:1, 6–8; Rom. 11:1–2a, 13–15, 28–32; Matt. 15:21–28

We offer petitions to our Lord, asking for his intercession. But in our sinful nature we are not worthy of what he offers, nor even to ask. And yet, because of faith in him he offers us not crumbs, not even the bread, but himself. How awesome is our God!

Message:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

Housed in an old shoe factory in downtown St. Louis, the City Museum describes itself as “an ever-evolving, always-thrilling, artist-built playground full of weirdly wonderful spaces to explore.” Some consider that an understatement and others say the description is misleading. For within the 600,000 square feet of indoor, outdoor, and underground areas, lies a playground that has been built with over 30,000 artifacts from around the world. And these artifacts? Most people would consider them junk. There are repurposed architectural and industrial objects, like concrete blocks and assembly line hardware. There are giant tree trunks and branches. There is netting, fiberglass insulation, rebar, discarded business signs, and everything else you can imagine. Over ten indoor floors packed with this.... stuff.... in a way that creates caverns, tunnels, ten story slides, and infinite opportunities for exploration. Almost everything in there was once counted worthless by its previous owners and was destined for the dump. Each item had once served its purpose but its value had long since diminished, and so each item was now considered an inconvenience and even in the way of what was to replace it.

But worthless is not how the founders Bob and Gail Cassilly saw these objects. They may have been discarded and abandoned, the world may have considered them without value, but these two people saw it differently. They saw what the world could not, or what the world refused to see. They saw immense value in these items and they knew that by gathering them together, renewing them, and setting them aside for a new use, they could build something that has now become a light to the city of St. Louis and an attraction that is known throughout the world.

There are similarities with the gospel passage that we have just read. Listen again to this passage:

²¹ And Jesus went away from there and withdrew to the district of Tyre and Sidon. ²² 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.” ²³ 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.” ²⁴ He answered, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” ²⁵ But she came and knelt before him, saying, “Lord, help me.” ²⁶ And he answered, “It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs.” ²⁷ She said, “Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table.” ²⁸ Then Jesus answered her, “O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire.” And her daughter was healed instantly.^u

Canaanites were considered worthless by the Jewish community. Indeed, back in the time of the Exodus, when the Israelites entered into the Promised Land, they fought these people for the rights of the land. These two peoples continued to hate each other, even to the time of Jesus. And so, when this Canaanite woman asks for help from Jesus, a Jew, is it no wonder that everyone, even the disciples, want to send her away emptyhanded?

And how does Jesus respond? By addressing their silent judgements head-on. As the crowd looks upon this interaction, Jesus voices the thoughts that are in their heads. He says, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel," as if validating their beliefs that Canaanites, or really *any other nation* is not worthy of anything that Jesus, or any Jew has to offer. You see Jesus knew that the Jewish community had hardened their hearts towards this nation; it had judged them worthless, and even considered them to be an obstacle to a better world. And then, as if to underscore their belief, he says to the woman as she knelt before him and begged, "It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs."

I can imagine that at this point the Jewish witnesses were probably feeling vindicated by his words. For here is Jesus, the one who says he is from God, the one who performs miracles and teaches by his own authority. Here he stands. And here he articulates what they are all feeling. Canaanites truly *are* worthless, not fit even for mercy from God. Even Jesus seems to believe this! How happy they must have been in the moment. But their pedestals would soon be knocked over for Jesus would then claim that his woman's faith was great. What? How could she be found with faith? She is a Canaanite and Canaanites didn't even *have faith* in the Israelites' God! And even if they did, even if *this* woman did, that shouldn't matter for God doesn't count Canaanites worthy.... Does he?

But that is exactly what he does. And in healing her daughter Jesus turns their world upside down. What was once considered worthless, is now shown to be of enormous value – enough value that the power from Jesus would go out of him and be used for restoration and healing of a non-Jew. What must have gone through their minds? Possibly a thought that if Jesus found the Canaanite people worthy, they should too... I can only imagine that that was a bridge too far for some of them.

But most of all, I wonder if what they thought was something that cut right to their hearts – even deeper than the thought that he valued Canaanites. If Jesus found value in them, did that mean that he found value in other nations? Is it possible that the Romans might be included, too? They were a hated people. Maybe even more hated! Rome was a people that oppressed and even persecuted the Jewish nation. How could Jesus, how could God find value in these people? And why would he even *want to*?

But this exchange shows that God *does* find value in these people; he finds value in *all* people! That is why he went to the cross. His sacrifice was one that covered the sins of all mankind – regardless of race or nationality. His sacrifice was the ultimate proclamation that God did, indeed, find value in each and every created person. None would be left out; none would be excluded. Salvation was available to all: to the Canaanites and even to the Romans.

But God doesn't just *find* value, God *gives* value. His breath gives life; his son sustains that life. And it is the desire of God that *all* would recognize the value he has given them by turning to him and receiving his mercy and grace.

And God's desire extends to the present time, to you and to me. We too are counted worthy, immensely valuable, even if we don't feel like we are. Even when it doesn't seem like God is watching over us. There might be some who think that they are just another abandoned piece of creation, maybe once valuable but no longer so. They may feel like they are destined for the dump, to be discarded with all other worthless things. But that is not how God views them and if this is how you feel then know that this is not how God views you. He views you with immeasurable value.

And how do you know?

If you want to understand your worth in the eyes of God, look to the cross. For there you will find how much value he places on you. For on the cross he paid a price for you that was far too great for you to ever pay. On that cross he counted you worthy, valuable. On that cross he gave everything he had, because you were worth it. He wants to spend an eternity with you and so he paid the ultimate price so that he could. If you want to understand your worth in the eyes of God, look to the cross. And then look to how he calls you through baptism into that same death and resurrection. He does so because on your own, on *our* own, we are unfit to even eat the crumbs that fall from his table. But through baptism he gathers us, renews and gives us new life, adopts us, and clothes us in Jesus' righteousness... and then invites us to eat at his table for because of Jesus we are now counted worthy. And he doesn't just offer us crumbs; he offers us himself – each and every time we approach him at the table he prepares for us.

Don't ever for a moment believe that God views you like the Jews viewed the Canaanite woman, because he doesn't. You are his adopted child; a child that he gave everything to save. This is the value he places on you. And it is the value that comes from him, alone. Receive it.

Please pray with me.

On our own we do not deserve anything that you offer, but through the death and resurrection of Jesus you have made a way where we could be counted among your adopted, and feast at your table. We thank you and ask that you instill in our hearts the motivation to proclaim this good news to all those we meet.

Amen