

LOCKDOWN DAY 145 – 18 AUGUST 2020

Molweni dear family and friends of False Bay Diocese,

Scripture: Matthew 15: 21-28

Hymn: *Jesus is Lord*

We have arrived at level 2 of lockdown. South Africa has a recovery rate of 80% and new coronavirus infections are decreasing. Thanks be to God. We are still in lockdown and must continue to place huge emphasis on social distancing, wearing masks, health protocols, especially hand washing. When you go shopping, put in an extra bar of soap to be made available to those who have a tight budget. We thank our clergy, frontline workers and health care workers for their support, their encouragement, for walking with us during this strange time. So, one step at a time and slowly does it. I will be doing fewer Reflections now that there is increased movement of our people. The next one for this week will be on Thursday.

For today, let us take another look at Matthew 15:21-28.

The gospel story is rich in meaning and unfortunately the hidden elements of this text are not immediately apparent. The Canaanite woman is a symbol of unbelievers who are called to faith in God. By acknowledging God as God, by acknowledging Jesus as Saviour, they will find healing.

In the Old Testament, God promises the land of Canaan to the people of Israel. That they would worship the Lord their God in that land. Moses was given the task to enter into the land that God had promised. In that land they would build the temple, they would worship the Lord God, so that all other nations would be drawn to the God of Israel. This was God's plan. In the end it was Joshua who led the people of Israel into the Promised Land. In the Bible, the names Joshua and Jesus, have the same meaning of Liberator, of Saviour.

Matthew in today's gospel text and it differs from the same text we find in Mark, tells us that the woman was a Canaanite from the land of Canaan, to illustrate the point that *just like* Joshua entered the land of Canaan with the living God, the God of the Covenant, this lady, the symbol of non-believers, will now enter into relationship with Christ, the new Joshua. Not into the physical land of Canaan but into the Covenant. This lady is a Canaanite but yet she calls Jesus 'Lord, Son of David'. In other words, she acknowledges that Jesus is the Liberator, the Messiah, the One who has come to liberate and free the people of God.

At the beginning, when she first made her request, Jesus did not answer her. After a third time, Jesus gave her what she requested. He was teaching us that he had withheld the gift, not to drive her away but to make that woman's patience an example for all of us. In the gospel text she calls Jesus, 'Lord', not 'Sir' as some texts have translated it. She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from the master's table." She acknowledges Jesus as Lord. What is also interesting here is that the 'house dogs', as it is translated in the text, would be better translated as 'puppies' because the people of Israel, even though they had received the Covenant, the promise of God, they are still little puppies because they had not understood it either.

The apostles, when approaching the problem, ask Jesus to give her what she wants. Again, the scholars tell us that this is not a good translation. The original text was 'dismiss her', 'set her free', 'release her' and this was the word used in divorce cases when you dismissed your spouse. The point here is that the Canaanite woman worshipped God as 'husband'. (*Please do take a moment to turn to pg 461 of An Anglican Prayer Book and read the Introduction to the Marriage Service and the prayer at paragraph 29 on pg. 468*) This lady was married to the wrong husband, her husband was not the God of Israel, so the disciples are saying to Jesus 'Give her what she wants because she is shouting after us'. A more correct, theological translation would be 'set her free' because she is calling out for that. Release her! Release her from what? From the wrong bond. And immediately after this, the woman calls Jesus 'Lord' and she falls down and does homage. You may recall that in yesterday's reflection I used the expression that "We are never taller than when we kneel before Jesus."

It is because of this act of homage and the recognition of Jesus as Lord, that Jesus cures her daughter. It is because of her faith, not because she is persistent. Yes, she is persistent. That is true but it is not the persistence that causes Jesus to cure her daughter. It is her expression of faith and her acknowledgement of Jesus as Lord, so that she is then released, divorced from her false husband and now enters into covenant with Christ. This Covenant is hinted at in the text when Jesus says, "it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs" and she replies that she could eat the scraps falling from her master's table. This also symbolises the Eucharist.

She is no longer a 'puppy' at the table waiting for the scraps to fall but she can now enter into the new covenant, she sits at the Table of the Lord and the Eucharist as a daughter of the Lord, as a child of God. No longer a Canaanite married to the false god, married to the wrong husband but now married to God and therefore is welcome to the table of God's nourishment, the Covenant.

When Jesus says that he was sent only to 'the lost sheep of the house of Israel, the word 'lost' does not mean that they do not know the way or they do not know where they are, the original meaning is 'destroyed', the 'perished' ones. Jesus uses this example to show that it is by acknowledging Jesus as Lord that we enter into covenant. Just like this woman was lost, she was bound to the wrong husband, the people of Israel who are lost, destroyed, who are perishing because of non-faith in Jesus must do what the Canaanite woman did. In other words, it was the woman's faith that overcame every barrier.

The Canaanite woman embodies the constant and universal quality that every human heart, Jew or Gentile, woman or man, slave or free, possesses. We are endowed by God with the capacity to take possession of our lives and offer our lives in faith. The lost sheep of the house of Christianity is our battle ground and all of us need to challenge those lost sheep with faith, to enter into covenant again with God. To grow up again from being a puppy into a proper dog, if you want to use the analogy in today's gospel. We are the presence of Christ in the world. We need to challenge the lost sheep of Christianity, the lost sheep of our own households, the lost sheep of our country, to come back to God because the example of the Canaanite woman teaches us one important lesson. It is only by calling Jesus, 'Lord' that the deepest yearnings, the deepest longings of our hearts can be satisfied when we acknowledge Jesus as Lord. Ask Jesus for mercy and pay him homage.

Nkosi, yiba nenceba. Here, wees genadig. Lord, have mercy.

Today, reach out to lost sheep of Christianity in your household, in your congregation, in your community.

Prayers:

We approach now the throne of our Lord, we boldly call out to God in our need, knowing that the Lord always listens to the prayers of his people.

That all Jews, Muslims, Christians, all people of faith will find renewed strength in God's mercy.

Lord Hear us. Lord graciously hear us.

That all nations and people's may find lasting peace in God's guidance.

Lord hear us. Lord graciously hear us.

That the ill, the infirm and the dying may find abundant comfort in God's deliverance.

Lord hear us. Lord graciously hear us.

That our beloved dead who have departed this world may find everlasting glory in God's salvation.

Lord hear us. Lord graciously hear us.

I am, Because We are, Because God is ... Opening hearts to heal God's world. *Jesus is Lord*

