



August 16th - There Are No Strangers at God's Table

Have you ever felt like you didn't belong? Perhaps you have wondered if your past, your failures, or your circumstances somehow placed you beyond God's reach. Many people carry these questions quietly in their hearts. The Good News in this week's readings is that God's grace is always greater than the boundaries we create.

The prophet Isaiah proclaims God's promise: "My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples." This was a remarkable vision of a day when people from every nation and background would gather together in worship. Psalm 67 echoes this same hope, praying that God's saving power would be known among all nations. From beginning to end, Scripture reminds us that God's desire is to draw all people into His loving presence.

Jesus continues this message in Matthew's Gospel. He first teaches that what truly defiles a person is not what enters the body, but what comes from the heart. The things that separate us from God are not outward appearances or human traditions, but the pride, anger, bitterness, and selfishness that take root within us. Before we look at others, Jesus invites us to allow Him to transform our own hearts with His grace.

Matthew then introduces us to one of the most remarkable examples of faith in the Gospels—a Canaanite woman. She was a Gentile, a foreigner, and someone many would have considered an outsider. Yet she approached Jesus with boldness and humility, crying out, "Lord, have mercy on me." She did not come demanding anything. She came trusting that Jesus was compassionate and able to help.

What makes her faith so extraordinary is that she refused to give up. Even when Jesus seemed silent, she continued to believe. Even when the disciples wanted to send her away, she remained. Even when the conversation became difficult, she did not lose hope. Instead, she humbled herself even further, trusting that even "the crumbs" of Christ's mercy would be enough.

Her persistence was not stubbornness; it was faith. She believed that Jesus was exactly who He claimed to be: the Lord whose mercy has no limits. She knew that if she could simply remain in His presence, there was hope.

Jesus finally answered her with words that are spoken to very few people in the Gospels: "Woman, great is your faith." Her faith was not based on her nationality, her social standing, or her religious background. It was rooted entirely in her confidence that Jesus is merciful.

Her story continues to speak to us today. There are moments when our prayers seem unanswered, when life feels uncertain, or when we wonder whether God truly hears us. The Canaanite woman teaches us to keep coming to Christ, to keep praying, and to keep trusting, even when we cannot yet see the answer. Faith does not mean we never struggle; it means we continue to trust the One who is faithful.

As we gather around the Lord's Table, we are reminded that none of us comes because we have earned a place. We come because Jesus has invited us. His table is a place of grace, forgiveness, healing, and hope. Here, strangers become family, sinners receive mercy, and broken people are made whole.

May we carry the faith of the Canaanite woman into our own lives this week. May we never stop praying, "Lord, have mercy." And may Christ continue to transform our hearts so that we, too, become people who welcome others with the same grace and compassion that He has first shown to us. In Jesus Christ, there are no strangers at God's table, only beloved children welcomed by His grace, nourished by His mercy, and sent into the world to share His love.

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