

What has God said and what has he done that has transformed our lives in such a way that we have a message that is relevant and meaningful for the community in which we serve? That's what we're going to talk about this morning as we consider the Gospel story of the Canaanite woman who pled with Jesus to heal her daughter.

OPENING PRAYER

Last week I returned from a Reformation tour. For two weeks I and ten other people visited the sites of the Reformation in Germany memorialized forever by cathedrals, monuments, famous buildings, music, and art.

We enjoyed great food and beverage, fine accommodations, transportation, and all the sites. The hospitality of the German people was extraordinary. Despite our inability to speak German and our ineptness with certain local customs, the people were kind to us.

On our third day of the tour I had to leave the group for a day and a night to return to Frankfurt to pickup one of our fellow travelers who joined us late. On the way to the airport I realized I might be going the wrong direction. Fortunately, I was sitting next to a man who was able to confirm my suspicions with the grumpy conductor, translating for me and getting me off the train at the next stop.

Nonetheless, I'd already gone about 30 miles in the wrong direction. So there I was on a platform at a train station that had been shuttered for the night, waiting for a train in the middle of nowhere. The traveler I was supposed to pick up was due to arrive in about an hour. I was sure we were both going to be stranded.

But on the platform there was another man. Just one. He barely spoke English, and I don't speak German. But with a few simple words and hand gestures, I was able to communicate where I was trying to go. But, alas, he couldn't help me. I said thanks, and we parted.

A couple of minutes later, however, the man came back to me. He'd found a schedule on a bulletin board somewhere in the train station, and he was able to tell me how I could get to the airport on a train that would be coming through in just 10 minutes. In sum, I got to the airport at exactly the same time the traveler arrived. You can't believe how thankful I was!

I was an outsider, a foreigner, but I found grace through the help of other people. They didn't know me from Adam, but they treated me like a friend.

In the Gospel we read about a foreigner who also received grace. She was from Canaan, the ancient enemy of Israel. She came to Jesus and begged him to heal her daughter, but he said, **Matthew 15:24-27: "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."** ²⁵ **But she came and knelt before him, and said, "Lord, help me."** ²⁶ **And he answered, "It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs."** ²⁷ **And she said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table."**

What's going on here? Jesus himself says that he denied the woman her request at first because his task was to bring the lost sheep of Israel back to God. But why? Why couldn't he do both, minister to the Canaanite woman and Israel?

Because if Jesus could reconcile Israel to God, it would fulfill the ministry God had given it in the first place, which was to redeem the world, which included the Canaanite woman.

We read in **Isaiah 56:6-7: "the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD, to minister to him, to love the name of the LORD, and to be his servants, everyone who keeps the Sabbath and does not profane it, and holds fast my covenant—⁷ these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer."**

And we read, **Isaiah 56:7, "my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples."**

That was Israel's mission, to induct all peoples into God's house. But as we know, Israel rejected her Messiah, and in so doing they rejected God's mission to redeem all people. But God is the master of turning lemons into lemonade! For

with Israel's rejection of Christ, and ultimately his crucifixion and resurrection God's grace was magnified and as we read in **Romans 11:15, 32** he reconciled the whole world and showed "**mercy to all.**"

What happened with the Canaanite woman was that she received a foretaste of God's plan to redeem the world. Her daughter was made well, and she knew that God's love was for all people, even herself, an outsider, a foreigner.

I began with the story about the two men in Germany who got me on the right train to the airport. Wouldn't you know it, they were both immigrants. One was from Bulgaria and the other one was from Syria. The Bulgarian was a non-practicing Orthodox Christian and the Syrian was a Muslim.

Germany, despite being the home to hundreds of cathedrals, monuments, and precious works of Christian art memorializing the Reformation is profoundly secular. A church with seating for a thousand has only 30 worshippers on a Sunday. Certainly, there are nice, hospitable, helpful Germans who were born Germans, but I think, generally, the people we interacted with were nice to us because we had money to spend. But the two immigrants who helped me had nothing to gain. Their intentions were pure. They showed me mercy because they understood simple human graciousness because somewhere along the line they too had received grace.

So this is my point: If immigrants can show graciousness to a fellow human being because they have been treated with love and respect, how much more can a Christian give to others the grace of God they have received because of the miraculous work of Jesus Christ on the Cross!

This is the astounding love of God, a love that knows no limits, a grace that has no bounds, from a heart so big it is able to love every man, woman, and child in the world!

In the beginning we were all foreigners to the Lord. Our sin had built a wall between us. Our rebellion was an uncrossable ocean. But we are no longer foreign to him, but we're his children. We're not strangers to God, but we're citizens of his heavenly city. This is not because of anything we've done, but it's because of grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

Each one of us has been the Canaanite woman. But God has shown mercy to us all.

Brothers and sisters, our own lives should reflect this grace we've received. For example, it is the policy of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod that we should not call immigrants who do not have proper visas "illegals," branding and labeling people in ways that dehumanize them. It is the policy of our church that we not play border patrol. That is the job of law enforcement. But our job is to minister to all people as children of God with love, acceptance, and respect.

Jesus did not deny the faith of the Canaanite woman. He could not. God help us if we should get in the way of anyone's faith. **"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).**

Friends in Christ, this is the message we have for our community, that we know God's grace and we want to share this grace with people who are foreigners, strangers, and outsiders in order to make them into family, friends, and insiders.

This week as we meditate on the Gospel let us embrace God's grace as something which knows no boundaries.

This week let us be filled to overflowing with thankfulness for how the Lord has taken us into his home as his own children.

And this week may you have the opportunity to share this good news with another person who really needs to hear it, in the name of Jesus. Amen.