

REFLECTION AUGUST 16TH 2026

My reflection today concentrates on the latter part of the Matthew reading which offers us one of the most tender and challenging scenes in the Gospels. Jesus travels to the region of Tyre and Sidon, a place where the Gentiles were often seen as outsiders to the Jewish community. However, in this interaction we see hope opening -- not in Jesus' attention alone, but in the woman's boldness of her persistent faith. Matthew practically forces us to ask "what limits our expectation of God?" and what does great faith actually look like?

Our story starts with a shift in location, into the place where the Canaanites were living on the edges of where the Jewish people were living. Jesus had been ministering amongst the Jews prior to this shift of location. Matthew goes a bit further than it being just a location move, he also turns it into a theological discussion we can have. A Canaanite woman, not a Jewish woman comes to Jesus and asks for mercy, acknowledging Jesus as Lord and Son of David. This is a significant acknowledgement because it's a messianic title that comes from Jewish hope and expectation, not Gentile. To be clearer, she discerns for herself there's something very different and true about Jesus, before she receives anything from him. She'd done what so many Jewish believers just won't do.

That action alone reassures us that it isn't God who restricts mercy to ethnic identity. The Gospel repeatedly shows that God's kingdom is way larger than anything we can imagine. These verses have become similar to an open doorway for Gentiles. We can walk straight into a personal and open, loving, and merciful relationship with God, through the words and actions of Jesus Christ. The woman's presence signals that hope isn't a privilege for the 'insiders', those with the most knowledge, wealth, those who speak the most eloquently, or those who are considered to be on an elevated theological plane. It is offered to the desperate, whoever they are.

Jesus doesn't respond to her immediately with the kind of help she asks for. Instead, we see an unsettling sequence. I wonder if that's because we live in a time of immediacy? Where we want and expect answers to occur immediately. They simply want to be rid of her and the disturbance she's causing. However, Jesus doesn't dismiss her distress, he witnesses it and it tells us a little bit about the struggles our faith must endure occasionally.

It's then that we become witnesses to the crucial exchange of words when Jesus explains his purpose was only for the lost sheep of Israel. These words are important immediately the moment they're spoken as they speak of grace, mercy and eternal life coming first through the promises of the death and resurrection of Jesus himself. When hearing it for the first time, or hearing it with listening ears, it may seem like the door is being locked before the Gentiles have the opportunity to walk through it, but not so. The woman's response proves the opposite, her determination to keep calling out instead of retreating into obscurity, reframes the promise and persistent trust.

Her faith is great precisely because it's not superficial or fake, it certainly isn't a brief emotional moment. It's a faith that continues to move toward Jesus despite the obstacles. That's why Jesus ultimately and publicly declares her great faith! Great and enduring faith will wait patiently for Jesus, despite the discouraging harmful words and actions of others. They simply don't know what grace and love that Jesus has waiting for you or them for that matter!

I've often wondered about the dog comment in this passage. One of the most striking features of this conversation is the language -- remember, words matter, how they're used and the context they're in matters. Our translation today just uses the word 'dogs'. The language Jesus uses matters because here it sounds like Jesus is describing the image of the Gentiles as dogs. However, James Montgomery Boice's commentary mentions that there are different kinds of dogs; those that are feral or street dogs, and those

who are domesticated or pets. (Greek: '*Kunaria*' little dog). In most commentaries the context of Jewish culture dogs could be seen as being unclean scavengers rather than a much-loved pet.

At the heart of Jesus' words is a metaphor about order and access: it isn't the children's bread that should be given first to animals. The woman doesn't hear herself as being condemned but given a chance to know peace through faith. Her response is one of wisdom and humility at the same time by not insisting that she's owed anything. She simply accepts what Jesus blesses her with even if it's just crumbs, she will endure and wait even for the tiniest thing.

Whether our preference is for the image of a feral dog or a pet dog, the theology doesn't change; she accepts the terms she's offered whilst still engaging with Jesus asking for mercy. She doesn't reject the image of dogs because she trusts the giver behind it. This is why her faith is so remarkable. It turns a degrading comparison into a prayer of hope.

If your image is closer to a feral dog then her response is even more courageous because she claims a place on the very edge of mercy claiming it confidently. If your image is more like a pet dog it still reflects her recognition that God's household has an order. In each case, her faith moves beyond any sense of self entitlement into trust.

If you think about it, Jesus' words could've shattered her. However, they didn't, they clearly indicated that Jesus was making room for her, and her daughter. The disciples wanted to see the back of her. The refusal sounded final. Even the image of the dog could've felt like a spiritual slap in the face. Yet, she persists, she doesn't give up, she persists. Her prayer isn't only for relief, it's much more than that. It's anchored in who she believes Jesus is, and what he can do. She's fully committed to knowing that Jesus isn't limited by what others may think about her.

This is something that each of us can hold on to. The Gospel teaches us that faith isn't just an emotional thought. It's what keeps us going when the chips are down, it keeps us reaching toward God's outstretched hand. Great faith can include wrestling, waiting, and responding intelligently when God seems silent or restrictive.

Ultimately, Jesus grants the request and heals her daughter. The healing is more than an act of kindness; it's a sign that God's compassion breaks through boundaries. The story suggests that Jesus' mission priorities don't erase the hope of Gentiles, instead we can see them as an invitation to grow spiritually. We shouldn't be confused about Israel being the end point, it's the starting point of God's plan and its development.

In that sense the Canaanite woman becomes a person telling us of how the future develops. She models for us what means for outsiders to trust boldly in God. Her great faith is personal and representative. Her daughter's healing becomes part of the narrative that the kingdom reaches far beyond anything that we can see with our eyes.

What does all this mean for us today?

We are called to deeply reflect on our limitations, and the importance of making room for others to come to the table, partake in the meal and be absorbed into the Body of Christ. Is there an assumption that God's mercy is for some and not others? Do we treat obstacles as proof that there's no point in praying? The Canaanite woman teaches us the opposite. Her great faith shows that God's compassion isn't constrained by social boundaries or anything else. Persistent prayer can be an act of wisdom rather than frustration.

Remember words, how they're used and the context we use them in matter. God's language can feel difficult. The woman didn't deny the image of the dog she moved towards the open door and gained a

glimpse of the character of God. She received Jesus' priority statement and still found a pathway of hope. That's a picture of faith that refuses to let rejection or delay define God's final word.

Finally, Jesus' declaration of her great faith can be imagined like a bridge. From the side of the Gentiles, hope crosses into the household of God. From the woman's persistence, courage flows into us today as we heard the Word spoken. And from the healed daughter we see that the crumbs of mercy can be enough for the broken to be made whole.

Amen