

HEAR MINISTRIES

SERMON FOR **August 16th, 2026**

Text: Isaiah 56:1,6-8, Romans 11:1-2a,13-15,28-32, Matthew 15:21-28

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Prayer: Lord, we come to You this morning with open hearts and ears. Holy Spirit, clear our minds and thoughts of things that are not of You so that we can receive the Truth of Your Word this morning. Thank You, Lord, that Your Word will not return void but will accomplish that to which You have purposed it. In Jesus' name. Amen.

The African pride revolves around the female lioness. They hunt together, raise cubs together and defend their territory as one. The males come and go.....the mothers keep the cubs safe. A lioness watching cubs does not look afraid. She looks calm – and that stillness is exactly what danger looks like. Her ears move independently, tracking sounds beyond human range. Her eyes sweep the grassline without blinking. If she rises slowly onto her haunches, something has changed. Every adult in the pride reads her posture like a sentence. Only around half of all lion cubs survive to their first birthday.

The threats are relentless. Drought reduces prey. Rival males that take over a pride will kill the existing cubs. Even buffalo can fatally wound a small cub that strays too far from the family group. The mother knows all of this. That is what the watching is for. The mother will do anything to protect her cubs and to ensure they are healthy and whole.

I recently read of a story about a mother whose son was born with a rare disorder that no one was able to cure. She was turned away by several programs for her son because she was poor, single and of Hispanic descent. She spent her whole life learning about the disorder and then went to school to get a doctorate in the field of genetics to research the disorder and try to find a cure for her son. She never gave up on trying to find a cure for him until the day they both died. Perseverance and love. A mother will go to great lengths for her child.

Perhaps some of you are at your wits' end over some situation in your life and you need help. Maybe you have exhausted every means at your disposal and do not know where to turn for help. **Whatever the need, take it to Jesus!**

In all three of our Scripture readings this morning, we read about God's grace, faith and the hope of universal restoration that goes beyond any separation of class, race, creed or color. Let's take a look at each of our Readings on the back of your bulletin.

Our first reading is Isaiah 56:1, 6-8. Here we find the prophet Isaiah in the temple of Jerusalem, standing before a very diverse group of people. Among them were foreigners (people who were not Jewish) and eunuchs, who were typically excluded from full participation in the worship of God.

Have you ever felt excluded or unworthy because of your past or your ethnicity or your circumstances? This reading challenges us to look beyond outward appearances and societal norms and, instead, focus on the sincerity of our hearts and the depth of our faith.

Isaiah is echoing Micah 6:8, where we are reminded of God's call for justice, mercy and humility. Generally, anyone who was not Jewish was not invited to hear the Word of the Lord from the prophets. However, here **Isaiah tells the people that God's love and grace are available to everyone, not just a select few Jewish people.** Even foreigners and eunuchs are invited to bind themselves to the Lord. As in Ephesians 2:19 ("*...you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of God's household*"), Isaiah speaks of Gentiles becoming fellow citizens with God's people. The commitment to love, serve and worship the Lord is a universal expectation. We read in Isaiah 56:7b, "*...for My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples....*" By extending hospitality and compassion to others, we demonstrate our commitment to upholding the principles of love and understanding. When we treat everyone with fairness, kindness and respect, regardless of their background or circumstances, we are following the example set forth in this verse. **God's covenant community is not limited by ethnicity or social status but by loyalty to Him.** Even in Isaiah's time the leaders of the Jewish synagogue and the people needed to hear this message!

Look at **Romans 11, our Epistle Reading.** Paul is addressing a group of people made up of Jews, Gentiles (people who are not Jewish), believers of The Way and skeptics. He assures the people that, while Israel has time and time again rejected God and now His Son, God has NOT rejected Israel. He says God chose a remnant of Israel, chosen by grace, and he explains how the Gentiles are grafted into God's plan. **Paul uses an olive tree as an example.** He says the branches that were broken off the tree represent those Jewish people who rejected God. The branches that were grafted in represent the Gentiles who receive Christ and believe in Him. He further emphasizes that God's mercy and grace is available to ALL, regardless of their background or lineage. He points out that those who reject Jesus will face consequences while those who follow Him are shown mercy.

Think of a child in a family who feels like an outsider because they were adopted.

Loving parents reassure the child of their equal standing in the family.....they are one of them and loved completely as are the others. Paul is using the olive tree example to say that those who are grafted in (Gentile believers) are **fully included in God's family alongside Israel**. It is unfortunate in today's world that so many Christian bodies are separated from each other. If anyone believes in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior and commits themselves to Him, they are part of God's family. Why do so many churches appear to exclude some people or appear to judge others? *It is something we must constantly guard against. No one is perfect. If you find a perfect church, don't join it because then it will no longer be perfect!* **We must love one another unconditionally as Christ Jesus loves us. This is the point of Paul's message for the people to whom he is speaking.**

That brings us to Matthew 15. Here we find Jesus and His disciples traveling to the region of Tyre and Sidon, where the population was mostly Gentiles (meaning not Jewish people). As they enter, they are approached by a Canaanite woman from that region who was crying out, *"Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon."* (Matthew 15:22b) **The woman was clearly heartbroken over the condition of her child and she was determined to get her child the help she needed.** Since this woman is not Jewish, she demonstrates a great deal of faith and persistence in seeking help from Jesus, especially since Jesus said upfront that He *"...was sent only for the lost sheep of the House of Israel,"* (Matthew 15:24) meaning only the Jewish people. The disciples urge Jesus to send her away since she is not a Jew, she is a woman and she is actually begging. But **she is a mother, willing to do whatever it takes to make her daughter healthy and whole again.**

This interaction between Jesus, His disciples and the Canaanite woman is an example of Jesus' compassion and willingness to help ALL who come to Him in faith.

Here **Jesus reinforces the message we heard from Isaiah and Paul in Romans.** The woman, despite not being a part of the Jewish community, believed in Jesus' ability to heal her daughter. **Her faith and belief in Jesus was far more important than any barrier that could have kept her from Jesus.** Faith is a universal language that connects us all to the divine.

Have you ever reflected on the impact of a strong and unwavering faith? This Canaanite woman's courage to persist in asking for help, despite facing rejection initially, highlights the importance of persistence and belief in the face of challenges. **It shows us**

we can always approach God with faith and persistence, believing and trusting in His ability to hear and answer our prayers.

Regardless of what we face in our lives each day, the answer can be found in Jesus.

He can move our mountains, meet our needs, save our soul, forgive our sins, touch our loved ones....you name it, He can do it! **But, we have to get it to Him! We have to ask.....and persist.** We need not be afraid to call on Him – He invites us to come: *“Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest....”* (Matthew 11:28) **We do not have to bear our burdens alone!** We can bring them to Jesus – He cares!! (*“Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you...”* 1 Peter 5:7)

Look at some of the obstacles this woman faced in coming to Jesus. First, she was

from Canaan – she was not a Jew. In the Old Testament, when Joshua led the people of Israel into Canaan, they had been commanded to totally destroy the Canaanites. (Deuteronomy 7:2) She was a member of a doomed race! So, this woman was descended from a cursed people and she was from a region known for vile religious practices.

Secondly, she was a Gentile mother crying out to the Jewish Messiah. She had no right to come to Jesus through the door of Judaism. She was a Gentile and Jesus *“answered her not a word.”* (Matthew 15:23) Then, He compares her to dog! This was the way all Jews looked at non-Jewish people. Generally, the word they used referred to a “mangy cur.” It was used as a metaphor for people who were considered “unclean, filthy and dirty.” The word Jesus actually uses here in this scripture refers more to a little puppy that is a beloved pet in a house. At any rate, the woman immediately catches His meaning. She says she isn’t asking to take food from anyone, she is only asking for a small morsel that would be fed to the dog – just a crumb. She knew just a crumb from Jesus was enough to heal her daughter and make her whole and she was not too proud to ask.

A third obstacle she faced was that of rejection. As Jesus speaks to this woman, His words appear harsh to our ears. His words must have shaken her to the very core of her being! Matthew tells us the details clearly. First, Jesus simply ignores her. It is as if He turns an indifferent ear to her cries for help. Then, He tells her that is whole purpose in coming to this world was to reach the lost sheep of Israel. When she persists, Jesus tells her that she is a dog and does not deserve the children’s bread! The disciples rejected her and now it appears that Jesus is rejecting her, too

Finally, the realities of this situation are harsh! Her daughter was possessed by a demon. She was a member of a doomed race. These religion men did not seem to care about her or her situation. It must have appeared to her that her situation was hopeless.

There are people today that are looking at some of the same barriers as this woman. Maybe it's you. You might be a lost person and you know you need Jesus, but you feel like you have no right to come to Him. Maybe you have discovered that "religion" will not work or you have experienced the rejection of the religious people around you. Yet, you still want to see your life changed. **If you really do, Jesus will not turn you away.** (John 6:37)

Perhaps others of you have been praying and seeking God about matters that trouble your heart. You have cried out to the Lord and asked Him to do this or that in your life and there has been no answer. You feel like giving up! **God's silence is not an indication of God's unwillingness to meet your need. God's silences serve to temper our faith and to remind us that He operates on a different schedule than we do!**

Regardless of what obstacles you may be facing today, persist in seeking the Lord, and in His time, you will see every barrier fall. Actually, our faith isn't defined by what we get from God. Rather, it is defined by how we persist and remain loyal even when He doesn't answer in OUR time. **It is trusting Him to know what's best – not us.**

What did Jesus do in the face of this woman's persistence and faith? Well, first Jesus RESPONDED to her faith. He was amazed by the depth of her faith! In fact, this woman is only of two people Jesus referred to as having a "great faith!" (Matthew 15:28) The other person was a Roman Centurion who came to Jesus to have Jesus heal a sick servant. He, too, was a Gentile! Jesus had tested the faith of this woman and her faith had risen to the challenge. Her faith had exceeded the faith of those He had come to save! (The Jewish people!) It was the same for the Roman Centurion.

Secondly, Jesus REWARDED her faith. He rewarded her faith by giving her exactly what she asked for – He healed her daughter. She was so confident in what Jesus could do that she didn't ask for proof! She took Jesus at His word and went home to her family. Only then, when she arrived home, did she see that her daughter was healed and her family was restored! What a blessing!

This morning, **in Isaiah** we saw how God's covenant community is open to everyone who will keep His promises and trust in Him. **Paul showed us in Romans** how the Gentiles are grafted into God's family. His promises, His mercy and the hope for restoration is for both Jews AND Gentiles. Lastly, **in Matthew** we saw that God's mercy extends beyond Israel's boundaries to the Gentiles and that **faith** in Jesus Christ is the key to receiving God's blessing, not lineage, race, statues or any other thing that separates people.

The hymn printed on an insert in your bulletin sums it all up very well. We will sing it in a bit, but take a look at it with me right now. Let's pray that we, like the Canaanite woman, will be persistent and bold in seeking Jesus. We can have the assurance, as verse three

says, that “...In Christ, now risen, [God’s] mercy extends; those on the outside are welcomed as friends.” Today, if you are looking for a place to belong, look to Jesus. He will welcome you with open arms if you really desire Him and put your trust in Him. He loves you and will fight for you like a mother for her child. Thank you, Jesus!

Amen.