

**Matthew 15:21-28**

**The Canaanite Woman's Faith**

<sup>21</sup> Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon.

<sup>22</sup> Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon."

<sup>23</sup> But he did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, "Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us."

<sup>24</sup> He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

<sup>25</sup> But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me." <sup>26</sup> He answered, "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs."

<sup>27</sup> She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table."

<sup>28</sup> Then Jesus answered her, "Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish." And her daughter was healed instantly.

After last Monday's derecho storm that impacted Des Moines and the Midwest I said to one of my colleagues in ministry who lives in Virginia "The world is coming to an end". She replied, don't be a show off we just had two earthquakes."

Now, speaking about the storm last Monday an article in the Washington Post said that scientists have long recognized that organized lines of thunderstorms can produce widespread damaging winds. Gustav Hinrichs, a professor at the University of Iowa, analyzed severe winds in the

1870s and 1880s and identified that many destructive storms were produced by straight-line winds rather than by tornadoes, in which winds rotate. The word “tornado,” of Spanish origin, was already in common usage, Hinrichs proposed “derecho” — Spanish for “straight-ahead” — for damaging windstorms not associated with tornadoes. In 1987, meteorologists defined what qualified as a derecho. They proposed that for a storm system to be classified as a derecho, it had to produce severe winds — 57.5 mph or greater — and those intense winds had to extend over a path at least 250 miles long, with no more than three hours separating individual severe wind reports. Now, one thing on which we all can agree is this, this kind of storm hits us surprisingly. Here I find a potential analogy with the gospel reading today. Many times events or people in our lives can bring surprising changes for good or for bad, but learning experiences none the less. The Bible passage today teaches us that even Jesus had his “spiritual derecho” through the faith and attitude of a woman.

#### Bible context

A Bible commentary says that Tyre and Sidon were both coastal cities in the Roman province of Syria, as well as historic centers of the Phoenician naval empire, an ancient nemesis of Israel.

Thus for many in Matthew’s early audience, these cities evoked foreign, hostile territory.

As Jesus arrives, he’s immediately met by a local woman. The term “Canaanite” signals that she’s a Gentile (Marginalized, excluded) and at the same time it evokes an ancient enemy of Israel. She is desperate and has come to seek Jesus’ help. Her daughter is possessed by an unclean spirit and it is important to note that she does not ask politely. She does not wait and make an appointment to plead her case. Rather, she shouts - so much so that the disciples are downright annoyed and ask Jesus to send her away. Jesus first ignores her, and then says, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel”. But rather than turn away defeated, the woman

audaciously presses forward, kneeling at Jesus' feet, traversing barriers set not only by patriarchy and other cultural norms, but also by religion, ethnicity, and longstanding enmity between peoples. For she is a Canaanite, a Gentile, and he is a Jew. But this Canaanite woman reverses the original rejection of this rabbi Jesus: "even the dogs gather the table's crumbs;" the logic of abundance implies that God's grace is for all people, right here and right now. Yes, Jesus got his theological "Derecho"! right there, he was amazed and then concedes the point (It is good to mention that this is the only verbal fencing match in Matthew that Jesus doesn't win!)

What can we say about this?

A possible interpretation of this singular encounter is that even God can (sometimes) be amazed and change if a human being presents a motion that shows courage, faith and a genuine heart for good. Let us remember that there is a tradition in the Old Testament that states that God modified his plans when confronted with Abraham or Moses's insistence. In today's Bible passage, we can see how even the Lord Jesus learns and evolves, a powerful lesson of humbleness and vulnerability. Let us also remember the ancient lineage of lamentation and struggle with God that the Canaanite woman portrays. Like Abraham, Moses, and others, she argues, stands her ground, and prevails. She masterfully fights for what she considers is just and right; she is not afraid to wrestle with God and insist on a blessing. Remember Jacob, after becoming Israel?

**Takeaways:**

Dear church, what I see in the Canaanite woman is that even God can be surprised by the courage, boldness and faith of a humble person. Even God can receive an amazing derecho of acts of faith and care if we stand our ground and present our petitions to God.

As Christian author, teacher and filmmaker Matthew Myer Boulton says

This is a perfect week to reflect on the nature of genuine faith. It's not a kind of certainty, as if its opposite is "doubt" - rather, it's a kind of courage, and its opposite is timidity. As the Canaanite woman demonstrates, genuine faith is bold, daring, and insistent. It puts first things first (a daughter's health, for instance) and it marshals every resource available, from wit to wisdom, insight to impertinence. It seeks God out with vim and vigor, and is finally unafraid to wrestle, to strive, to struggle with God.

In short, faith is living and active. As James puts it, "So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead."

What do you think? Can we surprise God with our audacity and faith? Can we consider the possibility that God is calling us to new experiences of life, ministry and mission?

As a derecho storm can we come and surprisingly hit the world with our faith and concrete acts of mercy and compassion to demonstrate that we are bold Christians?

I do believe so. Is it possible to have a Church without in person worship meetings? I do believe so! Is it possible to do ministry and share the good news of Jesus Christ to our community in times of a global pandemic? I do believe so! Can we hit the world with a renewed faith, courage and boldness, as a storm of love and compassion for all people? I do believe so!