

The 12th Sunday after Pentecost 08/20/2023

If this were the only Bible passage you had heard about Jesus, you might question for a bit who Jesus is. Even from everything that we have heard about Jesus this doesn't fully sound like him, does it? Everything else that we have heard and read about Jesus had him holding up women with respect and loving all people. But that is not what we hear initially in this Gospel lesson.

Jesus basically calls the woman a dog and he doesn't have time for her. She comes to Jesus out of concern for her daughter who is tormented by a demon. We don't know what the demon was, but the Canaanite woman came pleading to Jesus for help. Out of respect for who she knew him to be, she addresses him Lord, Son of David.

Jesus ignored her and did not answer her. His disciples got into it and said send her away for she keeps shouting at us. Then Jesus finally answered and basically said that I am not here for you, "I was sent only to the people of Israel! They are like a flock of lost sheep."

The woman further acknowledged Jesus by kneeling before him and said "Lord, help me." Jesus answered. It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs. The woman replied, Yes, Lord, but even puppies get the crumbs that fall from their owner's table.. Jesus then answered her, "Woman great is your faith! I will grant your request. The woman's daughter was healed instantly.

Could it be for just a moment that we see a glimpse of Jesus' human side? It seems that he lost his focus. Matthew's Jesus was always talking about adding to the kingdom. Inviting more and more in. At times Jews called Gentiles dogs as they did not feel that the Gentiles measured up to the keeping of the law. In this moment it seemed that only the Jews were Jesus' focus.

Jesus as a human being lost his focus and for just a brief moment was drawing a smaller circle. Jesus was telling the woman at first that he did not come for her. His disciples really picked up on this and pushed the point to get rid of her. But, it was the persistent woman that brought Jesus back to his focus. The focus being that the kingdom was for Jews and Gentiles, in other words everyone drawing a larger circle.

The woman knew who Jesus was. She addressed him Lord, Son of David. Lord, a step above others. One to be worshipped. There have been people in high-ranking positions who have chosen not to listen to people as they are beneath them. This woman believed that Jesus would honor her request and would eventually listen to her.

When Jesus tried to ignore her, she got down on her knees to plead. This was another form of respect that she was giving Jesus. She did not stop pleading, Lord, help me. Then probably the most degrading thing that Jesus said about a woman came out of his mouth, you dog, are not worthy to even have the crumbs from the masters' table. She came back again and said even the dogs or as some translate it as, puppies, the Gentiles eat the crumbs.

It was as if a switch went off in Jesus' head and he realized that he was out of focus. This Gentile woman recognized who Jesus was and what he was capable of. She treated Jesus accordingly. Her persistence seemed to make Jesus remember again that he was there for all people, Jews and Gentiles, drawing a larger circle.

In our churches today we have many different sizes of circles as to who is in and who is out. It seemed as if Jesus was drawing a smaller circle until he was reminded that the kingdom included everyone and that meant drawing the larger circle. At Faith, we have tried to draw a larger circle as we have stated in our welcoming statement.

We, at Faith Lutheran Church, welcome you as a child of God. As Paul said in his letter to the Galatians, "for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith." (Galatians 3:26) We strive to be a place where everyone is welcomed and affirmed.

No matter your age, gender identity, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, marital status, faith background, political leanings, or mental or physical ability – you are welcome as you are. As children of God, we are all one in Christ Jesus and rely on the unconditional nature of God's love and grace to be our help and guide.

Last Saturday was our community dinner. I have heard many positive comments about it. This is drawing a larger circle. When youth are saying that they appreciate our church, I believe we are facing the right direction or focus. The challenge is how to further connect with them.

I have heard many good options, but I don't know if we are set up to do many of them. Throughout this next year we will be looking at our system and how it empowers our mission statement, welcoming statement and goals or doesn't. A one-person evangelism/outreach committee is not able to do a great deal.

This is why it will be important to again identify the gifts God has given Faith and to use them where God is calling us to use them. The community picnic is a great connection with the community, drawing a larger circle, and can we use

that as a foundation to further connect with the community. It doesn't seem that we have a system that would allow us to do that at this time.

Faith cannot meet all of the needs of the community, but the more focused and intentional that we are the larger that we can draw our circle. Just as the woman recognized who Jesus was and continues to be, so are we called to recognize him. Lord, Son of David, please give us direction. She believed that Jesus could fulfill her need and she wasn't stopping until he did.

I believe the only way that we can intentionally keep drawing the circle larger is to seek Jesus' guidance. We have learned in our own lives that it doesn't always come on our time. It is persistence that tells Jesus that we are serious about having our need met. Our need being Jesus' direction on the mission work that we are being called to.

When Jesus didn't seem to be listening, the woman knelt before him and showed him more honor. She even dared to respond to his derogatory comment calling her basically a dog. She could have taken this to mean that Gentiles are not as important as Jews. This did not stop her, and she said even the crumbs are important. Whatever Jesus can do for her is important to her.

Jesus then recognized her great faith. No matter what, she was persistent. Jesus once again remembered what he had been preaching and teaching, that the kingdom was for everyone, drawing a larger circle. He remembered that he had been preaching and teaching that God loved everyone equally, no matter whether you were Jew or Gentile.

For us, we have put into words and on paper that this means: No matter your age, gender identity, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, marital status, faith background, political leanings, or mental or physical ability – you are welcome as you are. As children of God, we are all one in Christ Jesus and rely on the unconditional nature of God's love and grace to be our help and guide.

I truly believe that Faith has a heart for drawing a larger circle and is striving to do so. During this transition time we will be challenged to examine and assess how we are drawing a larger circle and who God wants us to be reaching out to. For us to do this will take persistence in seeking God and being willing to humble ourselves as the woman did in her kneeling that we may draw the largest circle possible.