

“Exceptional!” (Mat 15:21-28)

And Jesus went away from there and withdrew to the district of Tyre and Sidon. And behold, a Canaanite woman from that region came out and was crying, “Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon.” But he did not answer her a word. And his disciples came and begged him, saying, “Send her away, for she is crying out after us.” He answered, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” But she came and knelt before him, saying, “Lord, help me.” And he answered, “It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs.” She said, “Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table.” Then Jesus answered her, “O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire.” And her daughter was healed instantly.

Strange account we heard today. Jesus dealing with this Canaanite woman and her daughter. Very strange. What do you make of it? I propose that we reflect on three exceptional things as we meditate upon this event. Exceptional arrogance. Great, exceptional faith. Exceptional grace.

Let's look once more at what happened. As Jesus and His disciples were heading into the pagan territory of Tyre and Sidon, this Canaanite woman, hearing that Jesus is nearby, came looking for His help. “Have mercy on me!”

But Jesus, did not answer a word. Even His disciples couldn't endure the cry of this desperate Mom: “Just help her, for she is crying out after us!” And what Jesus? “No. I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”

The desperate lady wouldn't stop: “Lord, help me! My daughter...” And Jesus? “This is not right to take children's bread and throw it to the dogs.” Wow! But she still wouldn't leave Him.

“Yes, but even puppies eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table.” Then finally... Jesus gives her what she was asking for. I don't know what you think of this encounter, but I can tell you what thoughts and emotions originate from my heart, picturing all of this.

What is wrong with you, Jesus? Come on! Who would treat anyone like this? Who would ignore someone in such desperate need? Can you relate to these thoughts and emotions? This account doesn't seem to be painting too nice a picture of Jesus.

And do you know, what it reveals? It reveals exceptional arrogance. More specifically, it reveals our exceptional arrogance. Ours! For we dare to question and criticize what Jesus, the Son of God, was doing. Even when we can't fully understand His actions.

But there is something that we can understand and that we know well, something that is revealed to us as clearly as possible. It is – what kind of a person Jesus from Nazareth was. He was the most extraordinary, the most beautiful human being who have ever lived.

Even in His human form, – Gospels describe His selfless care for all people. His compassion for all who needed His help. His loving heart for all people and His desire to help everyone. He always put others first.

He crossed boundaries, He went against traditions, He ignored rules of that culture, so that only He could serve and care for people ... for people who didn't even know Him, who didn't understand or appreciate what He did for them. He engaged with people we prefer to stay away from, and He transformed their hearts and their lives.

The depth of His heart and attitude were amazing. His boldness and courage, on one hand, and gentleness and patience, on the other, were unprecedented. His wisdom and understanding, – unsurpassed. In every situation, He did and said exactly what was needed.

Not to mention that He lived His whole life among us, knowing exactly how His life will end. Rejected, abandoned and ridiculed by the same people He had come to bring in loving relationships with God.

This is who we are talking about here. About Jesus Christ, gracious, humble and merciful Son of God. This is how He comes to us still today. Considering each of you as more important than Himself. And what we?

Even as we can't understand what happened and why Jesus acted that way in that specific situation, we are quick to criticize with Him. How arrogant we, little, rebellious human creatures, are!

And this is how we often react to the Word of God. When we, with our limited and tainted reason, don't understand what the Almighty and holy God was doing, or is telling us, we are too quick to express our dislike.

The same is often true about our lives. We often don't understand what God is doing. Sometimes we can be desperate, we may struggle to make sense of what is happening. And we may imagine that we are in the position to evaluate and criticize the Triune God for His shortcomings.

He is the holy One. The consuming fire. The wholly other. Even the best among God's people have fallen on the ground seeing just a glimpse of His glory; remember Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Peter, Paul, John, and so on.

Some dare to go as far as to declare that 'if God does, or permits things to happen that I can't make sense of, I don't want to do anything with such God. How else can you describe such attitude, but ... exceptional and foolish arrogance.

But right here in this very account we can also find a witness of what proper attitude to Jesus is like. How to act in situations when things happen in your life where you are helpless to change anything, and where God seems to ignore you.

This woman's daughter was possessed by a demon. For some of us it can be about losing our loved ones. About terminal illnesses. About being deeply hurt or betrayed in the closest relationships. About losing our income, about facing

this life's painful challenges, and so on. Then it may seem that God has forgotten about you. That He has closed His ears not to hear you. Be assured, God hasn't changed... Jesus is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow.

His love towards you hasn't faded away. He hasn't abandoned you. He hasn't turned away. His commitment to you is as firm every day of your life, as when He claimed you for Himself in your baptism. He gently holds you and faithfully walks with you as close as always, waiting for the day, when you will see Him face to face.

But what then to do in such situations, where we seemingly can't hear God's answer, were we don't see His response to our prayers? Right here, in this very account we have our answer.

We are to respond to Jesus in faith and trust. Here we see what Jesus calls a great faith. Exceptional faith. What was so exceptional about this woman's faith, we may wonder.

Three simple things. She knew who Jesus was. He knew who she was. And she knew what Jesus was like. That's is. To know who is Jesus, what we are, and what Jesus is like.

Gospels don't reveal us much about this woman. We don't know who she was, we don't know where she learned about Jesus. We don't know how she came to faith. But we know that the Holy Spirit had enlightened her, and she knew who Jesus was, – the Lord, the Son of David.

The One whom God had promised since ancient times. The One who had come to bring restoration and new life to all who desire to receive His gifts. The Spirit had also revealed to her, who she was.

Or, we could say, what our status before God is. Luther put it well in his last words. "Before God we all are beggars. This is true." Before our God we are beggars.

He is the One, who "opens His hand and satisfies the desires of all living things." From Him we have received and continually receive everything that we have and everything that we are. This is how we are to come to Jesus. Without ambitions, without demands, as beggars, with empty hands and humble hearts. "Lord, help me!"

The third thing that characterized this Canaanite woman's faith was knowing what Jesus was like. The Spirit had assured her that our God is gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

This is what our God is like. Where else can we go, O Lord? Even if sometimes it seems that you ignore our prayers and have forgotten about our situation. The Canaanite woman didn't let the appearance of the situation to scare her away.

"I know, Jesus, that you are merciful Lord! I know that there is nothing good in me that would compel you to answer to my cry, but I know your heart. I am not going anywhere else.

I will stay with you and will wait for you grace. For even the crumbs from your table are more than enough for me.” She knew what Jesus, what our God is like. She just wouldn’t let Him leave, until He blessed her.

And here we come to our last topic, – exceptional grace. Yes, we are talking about what our God is like and what we have received from Him. As John put it, – from Him we have received grace upon grace.

Jesus didn’t have to heal the sick. He didn’t have to touch lepers. He didn’t have to free people from demon possession. He didn’t have to feed the thousands. And He didn’t have to heal the Canaanite woman’s daughter. But He did it anyway.

This is what kind of God He is. We tend to forget that we can enjoy God’s gifts only because He is gracious God. We tend to take His gifts for granted. We tend to think that we somehow deserve them. That Jesus is somehow obliged to bless us and to care for us.

For we are not some kind of pagans from Tyre and Sidon, right, or some unclean Canaanites of secular Australia. We are church’s members, good and pious people, so God would better be good to us.

No! No one is born who deserves God’s grace. No one is born who has any privileges before Jesus. We all are like this Canaanite woman. Unworthy even to approach Jesus, or ask anything from Him.

Our descent doesn’t make us better. Our heritage doesn’t make us better. Our status doesn’t make us better. Our education doesn’t make us better. Our good and pious lives don’t make us better than others.

The only reason we are here, is God’s undeserved grace. The Father has chosen you from before the foundation of the world. Just think about it! The Son has redeemed you from sin and death and devil, and has called you to follow Him.

He has made you His brothers and sisters. His fellow heirs in His Father’s Kingdom. He did all of this out of His grace so that you may be His own.

It changes everything. If we are here not because of our goodness, then how grateful should we be! How humble for what God has done for us! God’s grace takes away all our arrogance. It creates true faith and proper attitude.

We are beggars, He is our gracious Lord. He doesn’t owe us anything, but still gives us everything. If we are here, that’s not a norm. That’s not something where we can say ‘of course’. If you are here, that is an exception. It means that the Triune God has been exceptionally gracious to you.

I pray that as we experience God’s grace, it would dispel all our arrogance, that God’s Spirit would help us to trust Jesus like the Canaanite woman trusted, whatever happens in our lives, and that God’s grace would make us humble and grateful to rejoice in all His gifts. Amen.