

“Beautifully Broken – Unfiltered Faith”

May 11, 2025 — Selby United Church – Scripture Matthew 15:21-28

By Rebecca Stacey

Unexpectedly, her heart’s desire was fulfilled with a smile and the words, “Woman, great is your faith.” The man she called “Lord, Son of David” welcomed her by acknowledging her faith.

At first, her heartache alone could have crushed anyone’s hope in a loving God. But in the hands of Jesus, every life can be transformed.

Matthew ends his account with, **‘And her daughter was healed from that moment.’** It’s up to us to imagine the rest of her story.

I believe more than just physical healing happened that day. A child’s health was restored, a former outsider encountered Jesus, and perhaps a new family faith tradition was born. This mother received something even greater than the gift of healing—she came face to face with the Son of God, the long-awaited Messiah.

We don’t know for certain but given other stories and how Jesus responded to those coming to faith, it’s possible this moment changed more than just her daughter’s life – it may have changed her eternity.

Earlier in the service, I shared the advice that someone offered to reread the Bible, looking for God, not for oneself or circumstances. Today’s story may not speak to your personal situation, but it speaks volumes about God’s love for everyone. In His redemption plan, *everyone is invited.*

Remember, this woman hailed from a culture outside of the covenant. Before this moment, she was worshipping other gods and living a life far outside of the laws of God’s people. But it didn’t matter to her. Out of deep love for her child, she dared to dream that the Messiah of her neighbours would have enough grace for her too.

So, she recognized her place and humbled herself to approach and plead with Jesus.

At His response, she expressed her contentment in being considered even a lowly pet in God’s family. This woman, with every ounce of faith within her, asked for Jesus’ blessing and healing.

I believe that Jesus healed this woman’s daughter for many reasons. Obviously, love and compassion, but also to share with us through her faithfulness that His mercy and mission extended beyond Israel to all who have faith in Him.

The Apostle Paul would later write: **“There is neither Jew nor Gentile, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” (Galatians 3:28)**

Today’s faith encounter reminds us that God’s kingdom is for all people, **and faith** — *not circumstance* — is what matters.

How persistent is your faith if your prayers are met with silence? How joyful are you at the prospect of crumbs? Can you forge ahead in faith, even when God’s response isn’t what you want?

Life is both beautiful and broken — isn’t it? We experience the highest of highs and the lowest of lows, sometimes all at once. But through it all, **God is with us.** We may not always understand the timeline of His work, but we are invited to have faith — to hold fast in the waiting and the wondering. And in those sacred moments when we know deep down that Jesus is smiling at our faith, we can take heart and rest in this truth: **His grace is enough.**

Thanks be to God, Amen.

Motherhood is a beautiful gift. At this stage of life, I’m not a rookie mom, an empty nester, or a grandmother, but I think I can relate to most. Given that, I was hopeful it would be fairly easy to prepare a meaningful sermon for today. After all, the Bible is full of great women of faith and great mothers to draw from to share an inspiring message on this special day.

Well, if I’m honest, this week was challenging. Regardless of all the great material and music that exists to enhance our worship experience on this occasion, the simple truth is that Mother’s Day isn’t a joyful or easy day for everyone.

In fact, for some, this might be one of the hardest days of the year, as a child grieving a mother or a mother grieving a child, separated by death or distanced by circumstances. So, while I hope that the message today encourages you to persist in your faith, I also recognize that for some, just being here today is more than you thought you could accomplish.

Whether your heart is heavy, broken, joyful or a unique combination of emotions, whether your mother or your children are here with you now, or awaiting you, know that God sees you and loves you. Have faith that He has a plan for you and is still writing your story.

In our scripture reading this morning, the Canaanite woman, a mother, provides us with a remarkable story of faith. It’s a short story, but there’s a lot to unpack.

Her life was hard, some would even say broken. We can imagine that every morning, she woke to the same heartache—her daughter’s torment, the whispers of neighbours, the heavy burden of desperation pressing down on her like a

weight she could never shake. She had tried everything — doctors, healers, prayers to gods who never answered. *Nothing changed.*

Then, she heard about Him—the Jewish teacher, the miracle worker. The one who made the blind see and the lame walk. They said He could cast out demons with a word. A spark of hope flickered in her heart, although she knew what the others would say. *“Jesus isn’t for you. He belongs to them.”*

But the desperation of a mother has a way of drowning out doubt and reason.

Meanwhile, **“Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon.” (Matthew 15:21)**

If you flip back a chapter, Jesus withdraws from Galilee. He had been performing miracles, feeding thousands, walking on water, and engaging in conflicts with the Pharisees over the laws. It appears that Jesus travelled to this adjacent, gentile region to seek rest and privacy, but even there, His reputation had spread.

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.” (Matthew 15:22)

Can you imagine this? This woman, this mother had sought Jesus out by reputation. Desperately, she ran after Him, shouting, pleading, begging for mercy.

Canaanites were non-Jewish people from the region of Canaan. They were present in the Old Testament and were often seen as Israel’s pagan neighbours who worshiped other gods like Baal and Asherah (Judges 2:11-13). The Canaanite people were

viewed harshly by ancient Israel for their religious practices, and it would have been challenging for Jesus' followers to understand His compassion for anyone from this region.

So here we have Jesus, in a neighbouring region, and he is approached by this non-Jewish woman, who refers to Him as **Lord, Son of David**.

This is significant for many reasons:

1. Son of David is a Messianic Title

- It refers to a descendant of King David who would fulfill the prophecy of a king from David's line who would restore Israel and bring salvation (2 Samuel 7:12-16, Isaiah 9:6-7).
- By calling Jesus "Son of David", the woman publicly acknowledged Him as the promised Messiah.
- She expresses her faith in Jesus' ability to heal her daughter, appealing to Jesus' authority as the Messiah, not just as a teacher or healer.

2. Contrast with Israel's Response

- The title highlights the different reactions Jesus received in ministry.
- While many Jews (especially the Pharisees and religious leaders) rejected or questioned Jesus as the Messiah, this gentile woman boldly claims Him as the Messiah as she seeks His help.
- Her faith is so strong! Much stronger than the faith exhibited so far by Jesus' own people.

3. Foreshadowing God's Redemption Plan

- The Canaanite woman's bold faith gives us a glimpse of God's larger plan. Though she was an outsider, Jesus honours her persistence—foreshadowing the day when the Gospel would go to all

nations (Matthew 28:19).

- Her story echoes God's promise to Abraham: "All peoples on earth will be blessed through you" (Genesis 12:3). Through faith in Jesus, not heritage, we are welcomed into God's redemption story.

But back to the story. This woman makes her request.

But he [Jesus] did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, "Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us." (Matthew 15:23)

It's fun to chuckle a little bit at the disciples. They always seem so concerned about the optics of the interactions that Jesus has. They're like an uptight PR team around election time.

Anyway, Jesus initially seemed to ignore her request, but she refused to give up. She refused to let go of hope. Jesus finally speaks, giving her an answer that she likely anticipated, but didn't want to hear.

He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." (Matthew 15:24) *Translation:* Don't you know that miracles for everyone, aren't part of this mission?

At first, it seems like Jesus is rejecting her, but really, He's *probing* her faith—drawing it out to reveal a deeper truth. What becomes clear is this: it's not ethnicity, background, or status that grants access to God's mercy, but faith. Her story reminds us that God's grace reaches beyond boundaries, inviting all who believe.

Jesus' response created a moment of decision—a **moment in which her faith could shine all the brighter**. She knew she had no right to demand anything. But she also had **faith** in something deeper!

She believed this man, this Messiah, had more than enough grace to spare.

But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me." (Matthew 15:25)

You can picture it, can't you? This desperate plea. Jesus must have ached along with her at that moment. His love for humanity, knowing that His next words will sting, but that they will push this woman to reveal her faith in the most life-changing way...

He answered, "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." (Matthew 15:26)

There are some points of clarity to make here. I've learned that when you're reading the Bible and something doesn't sit right, it means you need to reread it. Hearing Jesus call this woman "a dog" left me perplexed.

References to "dogs" are made about 40 times in the Bible, and typically, it's not a compliment. However, in the Greco-Roman world at this time, small dogs were sometimes kept as house pets, especially among the wealthy.

The word for "dog" in this passage is different from other biblical references—it's *kynarion* (koo-nar'-ee-on), which means a small dog or puppy rather than a scavenging street dog. Jesus' words suggest a domesticated animal, perhaps even a household pet, though in Jewish culture, dogs were still generally seen as unclean. Jesus is potentially speaking to a broader theme of acceptance for everyone.

That said, there's a pecking order, and everyone knows the children are fed before the family pet. Jesus' words reflect this common understanding, but the woman's response shows remarkable faith—she accepts her place in the metaphor.

At this point, Jesus has already stated that He has come to fulfill the covenant—the promise made to the people of Israel. This is His primary mission. She knows this. She knows she's not worthy. And that's why I love her response. *It's so fantastic. With unfiltered faith* **"She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table.""** (Matthew 15:27)

Crumbs would be enough, more than enough. At that moment, her brokenness was about to turn into a miracle. She knows she's not worthy. She's an outsider, not part of the covenant promise, yet she has faith that even the crumbs will be enough. A crumb will save them.

Then Jesus answered her, "Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish." And her daughter was healed from that moment. (Matthew 15:28)

At first, Jesus' response to the Canaanite woman may seem harsh—reflecting how the disciples and many others saw her: as an outsider. But as the conversation unfolds, we see Jesus drawing out her faith, revealing her persistence and trust. In the end, He doesn't dismiss her—He *honours* her. Jesus saw what others missed: *a woman of great faith*. And with His word, her daughter was healed.

As a mother, her persistence and faith broke through the obstacles before her, and Jesus commended her for it, showing that God's mercy extends to *all people*.

Her life had been hard. She was tired, desperate and broken. She was scared and marginalized. She came seeking healing but left with something even greater: a personal encounter with the Messiah.