

**+ Matthew 15:21-28 + Come and Eat at the Lord's Table! +
+ 13th Sunday after Pentecost + 26 August 2012 +**

When was the last time you sat down for a big meal? Just picture it—the settings laid out ever so nicely. Room enough for every member of the family, even with chairs squeezed around the table. Mom and Grandma working hard in the kitchen getting this, that, and the other thing ready. Maybe Dad doing some cooking of his own out on the grill. The food placed on the table with care. Then the call goes out, “Come and eat!”

The kids and the family dog dash to the dining room table while the adults slowly approach their seats. Everyone knows where they're supposed to sit, even the family dog, or at least they have a good idea! So then, how strange would it be if someone told you, “Sorry, this feast isn't for you. You can't eat up here at the table. Maybe the dog will share some crumbs with you.” How awful! You'd have to wonder if it was prank or what it was that had gone seriously wrong that you couldn't partake of this banquet.

...Yet that seems to be exactly what Jesus does to a non-Jewish woman in our text, a woman who was crying out to him for help, a person really no different than you and me. When you read this account from Matthew 15, it seems like Jesus is rudely turning the woman away from his feast of blessing, but as we'll see, the woman would share in that feast. In fact, Jesus calls out to you and me, **COME AND EAT AT THE LORD'S TABLE!**

If someone invites you over for dinner, one of the first things to ask is always, “Where do I sit?” You assume that there's going to be a place set for you, and you can usually find it pretty quickly. As you make your way to partake of the Lord's feast, where do you sit? Are you even welcome?

For the Canaanite woman, it didn't seem like she was welcome at all. Jesus had traveled far north of Galilee to get some much-needed privacy and rest, but before you know it, that peace was broken. **“Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is suffering terribly from demon possession.”** A woman from the region needed some help, so she cried out to the Lord, and oh, how she cried! **“Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is suffering.... Lord, Son of David have mercy on me! ...Lord, Son of David!”** All she heard was silence. Jesus kept right on walking with his disciples, going about his business.

Would the woman ever get a hearing? Jesus didn't seem to care. Still she cried out, **“Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me!”** She kept following them. She kept crying out. Before long, she was starting to get on the disciples' nerves. “Will she ever give up?” “Why can't she leave the Master alone?” “Can anyone make her stop?” This woman was so annoyingly persistent that finally the disciples got fed up. Clearly she wasn't going to give up and go away anytime soon, so the disciples begged Jesus, **“Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us.”** “Please get rid of this pestering woman!” Jesus' response, however, strikes us as rather odd.

“I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.” Huh? Jesus didn't answer the disciples' request, nor did he answer the woman's. No, Jesus, the Good Shepherd, pointed out that he was originally sent to seek **“the lost sheep of Israel”**, those lost in sin and unbelief in the land of God's Old Testament people. Only after that would his search spread to all other lost sheep.

Nevertheless, Jesus' response didn't stop the woman from trying. At long last, she finally fell at his feet, grabbed on, and cried out, **“Lord, help me!” “It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs.”** Doesn't that sound cold, harsh, even rude to you? Jesus' words don't seem to match our picture of the loving Savior, who once said, **“Come to me all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest.”** (Matthew 11:28)

The truth is, even though Jesus' words sounded harsh, he was actually testing her faith and asking, “Would you take the food out of the mouths of your children and throw it to the family dog? Is it proper for me to do that with my blessing and grace?” The woman responded, **“Yes, Lord, but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table.”** What tremendous faith! The woman readily admitted she was not worthy of even an extra seat at the Lord's table. Still she appealed to his readiness to help. She trusted that Jesus could bless her even with “crumbs” from his table.

So where do you sit? Do you get to sit at the table to enjoy the full feast of the Lord's blessing or do you have to sit underneath with the family dog? Are you even welcome at that table? There was a time when you and I were not welcome. There was a time when we should've been sent away hungry.

We've done everything possible to lose that honored spot at the Lord's banquet. By nature, you and I turn our backs on the feast that the Savior prepared for us. Your sinful nature wants you to give in to its cravings and eat the greasy, nasty junk food of sin. For example, rather than seeing money as a gift from God by which he

supplies all you need and more, perhaps your sinful nature urges you to spend all your time trying to get more and more because you're just not content with the feast God has already given you. Perhaps that nature has cravings of a more fleshly kind. Instead of appreciating God's gift of sex within the bounds of marriage as a special blessing set aside for husbands and wives, your sinful nature craves to have its immoral desires fulfilled whether in the things you watch, the internet you use, or even casting a lustful eye at one who's not your spouse. Perhaps your sinful nature craves to gossip or be arrogant or erupt in rage or be lazy or selfish with the countless gifts God has given you.

By nature, you and I reject the Lord's feast for the nasty junk food of sin. For this reason, not a single one of us has any right to a spot at that table, let alone the dog's spot. No, the Lord should say to you and me, "I don't know you" and send us away where the pangs of hunger will never end.

...But my friends, you have a place at the Lord's table! Jesus has prepared a place for you there, so you can enjoy his feast. Jesus made room for you when he put himself in your place. He came to give life when you were dead. He came to bring you back when you rejected his feast. He came so you could share in his feast of blessing and salvation. He offered himself as the bread and water of life to fill your eternal hunger and thirst as he once said, **"I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty..."** (John 6:35) Christ didn't come so you could sit outside yearning for just a taste of his blessing. No, moved by his undying love for you, Jesus sacrificed everything so you could have a place at his dinner table—an honored and privileged position as his child!

That honored position as a member of God's family is a reality for you through faith in Christ Jesus. You see, when you were baptized, the Holy Spirit transformed you. He transformed you from a hostile, sin-loving, God-hating enemy into a beloved son or daughter of God, a member of God's family through the faith he created in your heart. Transformed through that water and the Word, you now sit at Jesus' table as a member of his family.

That faith that makes you a child of God was the same faith the Canaanite woman had. Hear it in the way she addressed Jesus—**"Lord, Son of David"**. She trusted that the One she addressed was the One prophesied of old to come and rescue the lost. She trusted in his mercy. That faith led her to admit her unworthiness to even approach Jesus, let alone sit at his table. That faith led her to accept the Lord's words and to believe that he wouldn't refuse her, even though she was a Gentile. That faith in Jesus led her to realize that she could approach her Lord in prayer, and he would help her. For that persistence of faith, Jesus praised this woman and immediately granted her request. Through faith, the Lord seated her himself at his table.

Being part of the family means you also can go to your dear heavenly Father as his dear child in prayer. You can bring all your requests to him, and he promises to bless you no matter what the answer might be, even if he says "No". You can persist in your requests to the Lord because he has more blessing than you can possibly imagine and he does what's best for you.

For a moment, consider how "full" the Lord has made you. You may or may not have much in your bank account, but you're well-dressed. You have shelter over your head, food on the table, family and friends to be with you, the Word of God and the Holy Sacraments present among you, forgiveness of all sins, and so much more, but Jesus saved the best for last.

By faith, you get to enjoy not only the Lord's feast of daily blessing, but that greatest delicacy of all—eternal salvation. Much like a delicious cake or pie that caps off a fine Thanksgiving dinner or a summer barbeque, one day you'll get to taste heaven itself and all the wonders that come with it. The great thing is it won't end. Knowing what awaits you, doesn't it just make your mouth water as you look forward with hope to the end of the meal?

Before you get to enjoy dessert at the Lord's feast, however, please realize that there's still room at the table and plenty of food. The Lord's feast wasn't just for Israel, and it's not just for us. God once said through his prophet Isaiah (56:8), **"I will gather still others to them besides those already gathered."** Jesus is not done opening spots at his table. He wants others to enjoy the feast. So invite your friends, relatives, co-workers, classmates, acquaintances, and neighbors to come to the feast. As you go home today, think of one family or even one person that you can personally invite to the Lord's house to join in this blessed feast. Then actually invite them. There's still room. There's still time (as God gives it). There's plenty of food. Give thanks that you have the privilege of sitting at your Savior's dinner table to enjoy his feast of blessing. Now come and eat! Amen.