

Matthew 15:21-28 – Have Mercy on Me, O Lord – Pentecost 12 – August 16, 2026

+In Nomine Iesu+

Life is always lived in relationship. The Church, especially, is about life together. Paul regularly talks about the Church as a body of interconnected people. Christians are meant to live the Christian life with other Christians.

For example, in Romans 12, he says, “For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.”

Christians are called to share burdens and blessings with one another. It is as Paul says, again in Romans 12, “Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another.”

My Mom’s Church posted this on Facebook just this week. “Don’t just attend your Church. Love your Church. Serve, give, join, worship, engage.” And I agree. This is clearly God’s will for us.

Now, of course, we need the right balance. Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote this wonderful little book called *Life Together*. And if you are looking for a book of his to read—because you have heard me talk about him so much—this one is his most accessible. Here, he introduces a distinctly Lutheran tension. “Let him who cannot be alone beware of community. Let him who is not in community beware of being alone.”

Thus, as creatures who need community, we also must find value in our time alone. Jesus did in our Gospel reading just last week. In fact, you will find nine separate occasions where Jesus retreats from the crowds—and even from His Disciples. He shows us the necessity of time alone for rest, prayer, reflection, study, and meditation on the Word of God. Notice I didn’t say television or scrolling on your phone.

If you are an introvert, you need time alone to recharge and refresh. If you are an extrovert, you need to learn the discipline of sitting still, embracing silence, and thinking deeply. The philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre famously said, “If you’re lonely when you’re alone, you’re in bad company.”

Now, there is something about the Church that offers a unique set of challenges. We are different from one another. The Church is a gathering of people. But we are people who, in many ways, are quite diverse.

It isn’t our ethnicity, our income, our careers, our education, our ages, our hobbies, or our political ideas that bring us together—it’s Christ. The Church is the people He has chosen for us—not that we have chosen for ourselves.

Now some local congregations are more diverse than others. It is different in the big cities and on the coasts. But even here at St. John we have lots of differences. We have life-long Lutherans—and we have converts to Lutheranism.

We have people who have lived in Clinton their whole lives. And we have people who are transplants from other zip codes. Some live in Iowa. Some live in Illinois. We have people in their nineties—and we have little ones who toddle around. We drive different cars. We like different sports teams. We have different tastes in music.

And sometimes these differences can create tension, resentment, and conflict. If I expect everyone to look like me, do things my way, or even understand me, I have a problem. And a mark of maturity is learning to set aside our personal needs and expectations. Remember, we are in Christ, and He meets all of our needs.

But in this diversity, there is something far deeper—something more essential—more significant—that unites us in the Church. I want to point us there today. And our Gospel reading will take the lead.

The narrative is about Jesus. Remember, we should read the Gospels as books that reveal Christ. And here, Jesus retreats from the region around Galilee to Tyre and Sidon. This means Jesus left Judea and went to Gentile lands along the Mediterranean.

Now, Matthew's Gospel is the most Jewish of the four Gospels. Matthew regularly references and quotes from Old Testament texts. He uses a distinctly Hebrew style, even as he writes in Greek.

He reveals Jesus as the Son of David and the true King of Israel—the King of the Jews. He shows that Jesus is the One who comes to fulfill God's dealings with the Old Testament Israelites. Jesus is Israel's promised Messiah.

And yet—in our reading—here we are again in Matthew's Gospel dealing with the Gentiles. The outsiders. The foreigners. The nations. Israel had been warned about these people—especially their idolatry and immorality. And yet, Jesus doesn't keep His distance.

It goes back to the Gentile Magi, the wise men who visit back in chapter two. In chapter eight, Jesus heals the servant of a Roman centurion. And Matthew closes with Jesus' command for the Disciples is to make disciples of all nations through Holy Baptism and teaching them to observe all that He has commanded.

But as we read Isaiah—our Old Testament reading today—this is the way of the Jewish Messiah. Listen to what the Prophet says about those who will be included in the promises of God in Christ.

“And the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD, to minister to him, to love the name of the LORD, and to be his servants, everyone who keeps the Sabbath and does not profane it, and holds fast my covenant—these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.”

So the promised Savior was always to be a Savior for all people, not just the Jews. Jesus was sent to incorporate Gentiles into believing Israel. And this becomes a reality in the eyes of the Disciples in our Gospel reading.

This passage presents to us a beautiful picture of faith. But the one with faith here is rather unexpected. She is not a Jew—not an Israelite. But her faith is still genuine.

And we can see that her faith is devoted exclusively to Christ. She speaks like a disciple. She speaks like a believing Israelite. She puts all her hope in Jesus. She calls Him *Lord*, three times in our reading. She calls Him the Son of David—recognizing that He is the one true King.

She uses the language of the Kyrie here—part of our liturgy, “Lord, have mercy.” This *name* recognizes Jesus' superiority and power, but it is also a subtle allusion to His deity. This word, *Kyrie*, points to Jesus' identity as Yahweh—the name of God. So, for her,

Jesus is King and Lord and God. She bows and worships Him. And she does well to place all of her faith in Jesus.

He is the only way. So, she looks for Jesus. She asks for Jesus. She calls out to Jesus. She even brings about the ire of the Disciples. She is too loud. She is a foreigner—although they are now in her community. She makes them uncomfortable. They want Jesus to send her away.

And even when it seems that Jesus doesn't care about her—when He is silent to her demands—when He suggests that He hasn't come for her— and when He suggests that the Canaanites are canines—in the face of all this difficulty—she doesn't get upset. She sticks with Him.

And she doesn't come to Jesus with attitude. She is not proud, or boastful, or easily offended. She knows that she has no right to demand anything of Jesus. She listens patiently as Jesus calls her and her people *dogs*. In humility, she even agrees with Him.

She is content with the crumbs at her Master's table. There is no sense of entitlement. The world doesn't owe her anything. Her Lord doesn't owe her anything. But she lovingly appeals to Him anyway.

Jesus, of course, knows exactly what He is doing—exactly what He is saying. He is not a racist. He is not having a bad day. Let's not make excuses for Him—or accuse Him of error. Jesus says something difficult to test her faith. His comments are for her good—and for the good of the Disciples. They are even for us.

She doesn't look the part. She isn't from the right place. She is an outsider. When she approaches Jesus, the Disciples stop and stare. What is *she* doing here? The Canaanite woman is the subject of the Disciples' prejudice. The Gospel couldn't be for someone like her.

But, as is plainly seen, Jesus did come for her. He will meet her request for her daughter. He will grant what she needs, and he will show His Disciples what true faith looks like—in this unlikely believer. He says, “O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire.”

These words are found in our rite of private confession and absolution. After the confession of the sins that particularly trouble us, the pastor says, “*Let it be done for you as you believe*. In the stead and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”

Faith is devoted to Jesus. It worships Him alone. It serves Him alone. Faith is determined—even when the words of Jesus are difficult—when the circumstances of life are difficult. And faith always defers to Jesus. He knows best. He is always right. Faith is humble, selfless, and content with what Jesus gives.

And it is this faith in Christ that unites the Church. This kind of faith *is* our life together. So, our identity—what we have in common as a body of believers—is found in faith in Jesus Christ.

In Acts 2, Luke says that the life together of the people of the Church comes about in these things: “And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.”

There is nothing there about ethnicity or ancestry. It isn't about the color of our skin. It is not how many years we have been on our planet or in Clinton or Camanche or Fulton. Our unity is found in our faith—in our confession of faith in Jesus Christ. This is our life together. This is our culture. Jesus makes us one people. Christ unites His Church.

And because Jesus has mercy on all kinds of people, we will too. We will be patient with one another. We will be kind. Let's even be interested. Don't test one another. Don't force others to meet your expectations. Don't set up others for failure. Remember, we have no needs. We are in Christ. We are one in Christ. Let's not be so needy.

There are going to be differences—not in doctrine—but in personal interests, in ages, in personalities. Some of us are introverts—some are extroverts. And it's okay. These are the people God has chosen for you. Let's be loyal to one another. Let's be patient with one another.

Let me conclude with Paul's pastoral admonition from Colossians 3. I love this whole chapter. I commend it all to you—even though I am just sharing a small part. It is one of the clearest explanations of the Christian life. And it reminds us how we see one another around here—all because of Christ. Listen carefully.

“Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all. Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.

“And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful.

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.” In the name of Jesus. Amen.

+*Soli Deo Gloria*+