

Sunday, August 16, 2026

12th Sunday after Pentecost

Proper 15A

Matthew 15:21-28 **Prayer: Faith's Wrestling Match**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, amen.

Wrestling Prayer

My friends,

Today's Gospel is a doozy, isn't it?

There are hard words here.

Words we probably don't like.

But there's also great good news here.

Today God is rattling our comfort

to drive His message home.

This Gospel Reading is no little trifle.

It's crucial.

It is teaching us

about faith's life and death struggle
before God.

This Reading teaches us

that nothing must stop us praying.

Nothing must stop us

from calling on God's name
in prayer.

Not even God's apparent "No."

Like the Old Testament Patriarch Jacob,

this Canaanite wrestles with God and wins.

She wrestles

through her **unworthiness**.

She wrestles

through His **silence**.

She wrestles

through His **no**.

She doesn't let go

until she gets her "yes."

Prayer isn't always like one of those Precious Moments figurines.

You know,
the serene meditation.
The cute calmness.
Often,
prayer is a gruelling wrestling match.
A wrestling match God wants you to win.

We've all experienced this wrestling

of faith,
haven't we?
The woman in the Gospel
is praying
for something good.
The deliverance
of her daughter.
You too have prayed
for good things.
(I don't mean Pink Cadillacs and a billion dollars.
I mean the good things—the Lord's Prayer things.)
You've prayed
for children who have left the faith.
For God's kingdom
to come
and drive evil
out from the world.
For forgiveness
and healing
in broken relationships.
For relief
from the devil's attacks.
Relief from temptations
to appealing sins.
For healing
of disease.
Easing of pain.

And what's the response?

Sometimes Heaven seems like a vast,
void silence.

Or worse,
circumstances made it appear
God's answer is an absolute "no."

What do we do
in the face of such a trial?

My friends,

In the face of such a trial,
Jesus raises up the example
of this woman's "great" faith.
She stands as a stark contrast
to St. Peter, who, last Sunday,
walked on the stormy sea with Jesus.

Last week,
Jesus said to Peter,
*"O you of little faith,
why did you doubt?"* (Matthew 14:31)

Jesus says to this Canaanite woman,
*"O woman, great is your faith!
Let it be done for you
as your desire."* (Matthew 15:28)

But

the storm that she walked,
was God Himself.
In the face of silence and noes,
the Lord Jesus has given us
this Canaanite lady.
She teaches us
to persevere in prayer.
Even when God's answers seem cold
and heartless.

Today Jesus forces a question on us:

Will you give up
in light of your circumstances?
Or will you hold Me
to My Word
like this dear,
faithful woman?

I. Wrestling Worthiness (Matthew 15:21-22)

Beloved in the Lord,

This dear woman overcomes three challenges.

The first challenge she wrestles against
is her **unworthiness**.

Have you ever felt “not good enough”
to pray?

I know I have.

We often fear
that God will think us unworthy
to listen to.

That we have no right
to ask anything of Him.

If anyone had a reason

to think

God would not listen,
it was this woman.

She was a Gentile woman.

Even there,
that means she has no business talking
to a Jewish rabbi.

But she wasn't just any regular Gentile.

She was a Canaanite.

The sort of Gentile
the Israelites were supposed

to wipe out

in the OT.

She was NOT a part
of God's elect.

But she is not focused
on who she is.
She is focused
on who Jesus is.
*“Have mercy on me,
O Lord,
Son of David!”* (Matthew 15:22)
Jesus is the one who
had come
to drive out the Devil.
The one who came
to destroy the devil’s work.
Like what the devil
had worked
in her daughter.
*“Have mercy on me,
O Lord, Son of David;
my daughter is severely oppressed
by a demon.”* (Matthew 15:22)

St. Mark,
in his account,
tells us
that she had heard about Jesus.
She must have had heard
about His mercy.
She had heard the good news
about Jesus.
And believing that Word,
she comes.
With no regard for her person,
trusting only in Jesus,
she comes.
*“Have mercy on me,
O Lord,
Son of David!”*

She reminds us

that we pray to God
because He is merciful.

We don't pray based
on who we are.

How good we are.

We don't pray based
on how we feel.

Or what's inside us.

We pray based
on Christ's command
and promise.

You may be a Jew,

a Gentile,

a Canaanite,

or a sinner.

Whatever you are—

you are called

to pray.

Christ's death has removed everything

that would keep you

from God's presence.

Regardless

of who you are,

what you've done

or failed to do,

you can pray.

Christ's shed blood

has purchased access

to the Father's ear.

The Lord Jesus says to you,

*“Ask,
and it will be given
to you;
seek,
and you will find;
knock,
and it will be opened
to you.
For everyone who asks receives,
and the one who seeks finds,
and to the one who knocks
it will be opened.”* (Matthew 7:7–8)

And:

*“Truly, truly, I say to you,
whatever you ask
of the Father
in My name,
He will give it
to you.”* (John 16:23)

And Scripture proclaims:

*“**Everyone** who calls
on the name
of the Lord
will be saved.”* (Romans 10:13)

Regardless of who you are,

you can pray
because of Christ’s merciful command
and promise.
*“Let us then with confidence
draw near to the throne of grace,
that we may receive mercy
and find grace
to help in time of need.”* (Hebrews 4:16)

II. Wrestling Silence (Matthew 15:23-24)

My friends,

The second challenge she wrestles is God's **silence**.

Verse 23 says,

"But [Jesus]

did not answer her a word." (Matthew 15:23)

She cries to Him for mercy.

And the answer is silence.

This is no peaceful quiet.

This is the kind
of silence that hurts.

Here,

she experiences that painful silence
from God.

And worse.

She witnesses Him engaging
with His Disciples.

Others are receiving the words of Christ,
but not her.

The prayers
of others

have been answered.

Other people's prayers
are being heard.

But she receives nothing.

But what does she do?

She clings to the word
she had heard.

This man is the Lord.

The Messiah,
the Son of David.

The Gospel says He is merciful.

He doesn't look like it
at the moment.

But she clings
to the Word about Him.

And she keeps crying
out after Him.

There are times
when we pray
and hear nothing.
We feel like we are talking
to no one.
Yet even as Jesus remained silent,
she continually recalled the Word
she had heard about Him,
letting it sustain her faith.
Romans 10:17 says,
*“Consequently,
faith comes by hearing,
and hearing through the word
about Christ.”* (Romans 10:17)

There are times
when all we have
is God’s bare word.
Your situation says
that God doesn’t care.
Your feelings say
God isn’t there.
There’s silence.
No answer
to our cry
for mercy.
Except for words written on a page.
Words like Micah 7:18:
“[God] delights in mercy.”
Or today’s Psalm:
“God shall bless us!”

What will you do
when you pray,
and God is silent?
What will you do
when you pray
for mercy
and blessing,
but no blessing
or mercy comes?
That's what happened
to this Canaanite woman.
What did she do?
She persisted
in prayer.
She clung
to the Word about Christ.
She kept on crying
out after Him.

If you are in the time
of painful silence,
do not lose heart.
God shall bless us,
and delight
in mercy toward us.
Keep on crying out
after Him.
*"Have mercy on me,
O Lord,
Son of David!"*

III. Wrestling God's "No" (Matthew 15:25-28)

My friends,

The third challenge she wrestled through was God's "No!"

She chases Jesus
into the house.

*"She came
and knelt down
before Him,*

saying,

'Lord, help me!'

And He answered and said,

'It is not right

to take the children's bread

and throw it

to the dogs!'" (Matthew 15:25–26)

There's no real way

to soften that.

That's the Law.

And the Law is insulting.

The Jews of the day

would deride Gentiles

by calling them dogs.

But our remarkable Canaanite doesn't argue.

She takes it.

She will take any word

from Christ.

"So she said, '

Yes, Lord,

for even the dogs eat the crumbs

that fall from

their master's table.'" (Matthew 15:27).

She cracks open

the upside-down nature

of God's kingdom.

The last shall be first.

The first shall be last.

The least shall be the greatest.

She confesses
that He is Lord.
She confesses
that He will bless His children
with abundant mercy.
So much mercy
that even a lowly Canaanite dog like herself
will benefit
from His work.
*“Let the peoples praise you,
O God;
let **all** the peoples praise you!”* (Psalm 67:3)

She has pinned Christ
with His own words.
Martin Luther says,
“Thus,
she catches Christ
in His own words,
and He is happy
to be caught...
So,
she seizes Christ,
the Lord,
by His own words and,
in doing so,
secures not only the rights
of a dog,
but also the privileges
of a child.
Now then,
where will He go,
our dear Jesus?
He let Himself be made captive
and must comply.
Be sure of this:
That is what
He most deeply desires.”

Jesus **is** merciful.

He is merciful
to the sinners.

He is merciful
to the outcasts.

He is merciful
to the dogs.

As the Mother of our Lord said:

*“He has filled the hungry
with good things,
and the rich
he has sent away empty.”* (Luke 1:53)

If you are a sinner

and a dog,
then you may claim
all the rights
of all sinners
and dogs.

For God has given them
the forgiveness of sins.

Then you not only have the crumbs
under the table,
but a seat at the table
as God’s child.

God only makes sinners
into saints.

God only makes dogs
into children.

*“He has filled the hungry with good things,
and the rich he has sent away empty.”*

What **appeared**

to be a “No”
was really
only an invitation.
An invitation
to eat at His table.

And here is the proof:

*“Then Jesus answered her,
‘O woman,
great is your faith!
Let it be done
for you
as you desire.’
And her daughter was healed instantly.”* (Matthew 15:28).

If you are in the time
of painful “no”,
do not lose heart.
God shall bless us,
and delight in mercy
toward us.
Keep on crying out after Him.
*“Have mercy
on me,
O Lord,
Son of David!”*

*** Wrestling Win**

My friends,
We wrestle
with God
to win.
He calls us
to keep on praying
and not lose heart.
For He desires
to give you the victory
in the Lord Jesus.
St. Peter writes
in His first Letter:
*“In this you rejoice,
though now for a little while,
if necessary,
you have been grieved*

*by various trials,
 so that the tested genuineness
 of your faith
 —more precious than gold
 that perishes
 though it is tested
 by fire—
 may be found
 to result
 in praise and glory and honor
 at the revelation
 of Jesus Christ.” (1 Peter 1:6–7).*

The faith
 of this Canaanite lady
 was tested
 in fire.
 And Christ found it genuine.
 And in the sight of all,
 for all generations,
 He proclaimed it
more precious than gold.
*“O woman,
 great is your faith!”*

Jesus delights
 in the prayers
 of His people.
 He may not always be quick
 to answer
 as we see quickness.
 His delay may even be good for us,
 teaching us
 to persevere in faith.
 But He has promised
 to answer.
 And He loves it
 when we hold Him
 to His promises.

His yes will come sooner or later.

Or even
at the resurrection.
It may come
in a way
we never expected.
And in an abundance
we never dared expect.
But it will come.
So do not give up.
Do not let Him
off the hook
He has given You
in His Word.
He has promised
to be faithful.
He has promised
to hear our prayers.
*“Ask,
and it will be given
to you.”*

We cling
to His promises,
especially
when He **appears**
to be acting contrary
to them.
As Luther says,
“Let us therefore
never doubt
that we have a ‘Yes’
in heaven,
imbedded
in the heart
of our Lord Jesus Christ,
and His Father’s,
and that in His time
it will be revealed.”

The peace of God, which surpasses understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, amen.