

**SERMON: "STORIES OF HOSPITALITY ... LESSON LEARNED"**  
**TEXT: OLD TESTAMENT**  
**NEW TESTAMENT MATTHEW 15:21-28**

**November 3, 2025**  
**Worship with Jubilee UMC**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

You know those countdown clocks. You see them at new years and in the movies, usually counting down to something dramatic like "time until impact." What if we had more of those kind of clocks for all sorts of purposes, including ones that counted backwards?

Say you had a clock in your house hanging where you would see it often like in the kitchen or over the TV. And say it counted backwards ... to the last time you were wrong. And not just that, but to the last time you were wrong ... and admitted it ... and learned from it.

Which brings me to this passage from Matthew's gospel  
In my now 38 years of ministry I have never preached on this passage  
It is not in the lectionary readings that guide many a preacher  
And why might that be? Could this be that one awkward story about when Jesus got it wrong? And if so, can we, like him, learn from it?

Just last week I was preaching about how Jesus over and over again goes out of his way to reach people, especially the outcasts, the sinners  
I've been preaching on the stories of hospitality in the gospels  
Last week the focus was on the story of Jesus and Zaccheaus

So this week, I thought I'd switch things up with this story  
Was going to preach on Jesus as host with the story of the road to Emmaus when the risen Christ breaks bread, then they recognize who he is  
That'd work well as we celebrate communion together, our two churches

But I went with this story instead ... is this a story of hospitality?  
And what might we learn from it, from Jesus' own trial and error

**Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. 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." But he did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, "Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us." He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."**

## ABOUT PLACE

That is the first half of the story. Don't see much hospitality yet  
Quite the opposite really. At first, Jesus ignores her, doesn't answer her at all  
Then the disciples urge him to send her away because she keeps shouting  
They didn't want her there, but there she was

I was teaching a bible study at the church I served in Georgia, trying to give  
them a sense of place when I said, 'You know I'm a bit of a geography nerd.'  
With that a hand shot up in the back and a friend said loud and clear,  
'That's not fair Dave. You're a nerd in lots of ways.' Yes, thank you.

Let's talk place. It is particularly important in this story, in several ways  
Jesus has again gone out of his way this time way up north near Tyre  
That is almost on the Lebanese border. It is a place where he will  
most likely come across some different folks, including some people  
a faithful Jew would consider an ancient foe – a Canaanite.

The woman in this story is not out of place. Some scholars suggest Jesus  
may have been up that way to get away. He'd just had another argument  
with the Pharisees about following the rules. Whatever the case may be,  
he does have a habit of being in those kind of places

His going there to get away seems plausible in terms of distance from Jerusalem  
There again maybe Jesus went that way because there was a story to be told,  
a lesson learned. Did Jesus himself learn a lesson from this woman who cried  
out to him to heal her daughter, who challenged his worldview just a bit?

**Jesus 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." He answered, "It is not fair to take the children's food 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, "Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish." And her daughter was healed from that moment.**

More about place. Jesus is clear about his place. He has been sent to  
the lost sheep of Israel. He is the Jewish Messiah. That is THE primary point  
of Matthew's gospel. It is why he started his account not with a great intro  
but with a genealogy that connects Jesus all the way back to Abraham

The woman knows that about Jesus. She calls him, 'Lord, son of David.'  
She kneels before him. She knows who she is talking to. She knows  
what he has been sent by God to do. She knows his place ... and his range.  
She knows that Jesus can heal her daughter

## SHE'S THE TEACHER

Jesus is THE teacher, but through her perseverance and her awesome answer in response to Jesus' comment about taking the kid's food and throwing it to the dogs - she ends up, the way I see it, being the teacher  
Maybe Jesus learned a lesson from her. We most certainly can.  
Tom Long, in his commentary on this passage, points to her example.

*The woman does not challenge Jesus' definition of himself or of his mission. Indeed, her reply indicates she is willing to stand on his ground, willing to accept his identity as Israel's messiah, as the one sent to the lost sheep of Israel, but that she understands, in all humility, this is to include her too.*

'This is to include her too.' What a great way to see yourself, and see the world.  
Might we learn something from her example, some encouragement.  
"No, you cannot leave me out. I too belong here."  
"No, you cannot leave them out ... they belong here too"

I think she not only fought for her daughter.  
I think she teaches us a lesson ... And maybe even taught Jesus one too

We had a presbytery meeting this week (that is like a Methodist district)  
The meeting was at a small church in a small town. We worshipped together  
We had communion together. I remember the table from that worship service  
They had a nice table cloth over the elements when we started  
I'm not really a fan of that. Please don't hide the bread and juice

And I don't like the ceremony of taking off that cloth (I know one church that did so and then folded the cloth like a flag - ugh). I did enjoy the way it unfolded (pun on purpose) at that presbytery meeting. They took the cloth off and several pieces of bread stuck to it eventually falling off and down onto the table and even onto the floor ... loved that

Dear worship committee at Cedar Heights ... I'll be asking you about how we might do communion in the future. Can we intentionally spill a few pieces of bread on the table and even on the floor?  
I'll clean it up right after worship. Promise

**Jesus answered, "It is not fair to take the children's food 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, "Woman, great is your faith!"**

I make that suggestion about leaving crumbs (for just a little while) knowing it might not fly. Not everything works. We learn by trial and error.

## SUMMARY

So let me tell you about one thing that has not worked in my ministry here  
The church has picked up on my being a football fan. Got a good many  
people who seem to have developed an interest in the Georgia Bulldogs  
my school, my team. Go Dawgs!

I've also talked to them now going on 12 years about my other football team  
The original football, soccer, and my team – Liverpool  
And the response there ... crickets. I have not succeeded in my effort  
to make some of these church folks futbol fans, Liverpool fans

So let me try again, a soccer image. After the game, often times the men  
will remove their shirts (maybe give it to a fan). When they do you will  
notice they are wearing what looks like a sports bra. There are chips  
in those. They wear them to keep track of their movements in a game,  
key statistics that coaches, trainers and analysts use in their work

They produce heat maps to show where that player spends most of their time  
Being a big fan (and a futbol nerd) I too find them helpful  
I watch more than my fair share of futbol commentary on YouTube

About those heatmaps ... what would yours show? Where you been?  
It would show a clear pattern of the places you go, where you spend your time  
Is your heat map a bit too predictable, so familiar it doesn't ...  
push up against any boundaries, doesn't cross paths with any Canaanites,  
doesn't ask any questions, doesn't learn any new lessons?

If there is one great lesson I have learned in my ministry in the Cedar valley...  
It is about place. Cedar Heights, I am so glad you are here. I'm thankful  
Thanks for making the trip. Please do me a favor. Don't make this just  
a once-a-year visit. Find a reason to get involved in Waterloo.

I'll give you a reason. Veronica and her team are much better cooks than me  
I'm going to promote Le Christopher's Southern Cuisine better  
It is great food and fellowship for Sunday lunch once a month

And Jubilee ... find a reason to get involved in Cedar Falls, please

I may not succeed in turning y'all, any church or churches into soccer fans  
But I do pray I might push you just enough to expand your heat maps  
Just enough to get to know some Canaanites  
Just enough to learn something new  
Just enough to spill some bread