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Speak Up!
Matthew 15:21-28

*Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. ²² 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.” ²³ 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.” ²⁴ He answered, “I was sent **only** to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” ²⁵ But she came and knelt before him, saying, “**Lord, help me.**” ²⁶ He answered, “It is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs.” ²⁷ She said, “Yes, Lord, yet **even the dogs eat** the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.” ²⁸ Then Jesus answered her, “**Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.**” And her daughter was healed instantly.*

Ever known **a mom with a sick kid?**

Maybe you’ve been one?

If you have seen this situation, you know that **nothing comes between** a mom who wants help and healing for her sick child.

Nothing.

In the movie ***Miracles from Heaven***, Jennifer Garner is a mom of a little girl who’s in constant pain. She persists in taking her daughter to doctors and specialists and hospitals. In one scene having been told she cannot get an appointment she just goes and camps out at the doctor’s office until they finally see her...

she persists until they diagnose

a rare and potentially fatal disorder.

That’s this mom--this Canaanite woman

whose daughter is being tormented by a demon.

We’re not told what that means exactly,

but we can assume she’s in misery—

or this mom would not be chasing down Jesus

and refusing to take no for an answer!

She’s a mom with a mission, and nothing is going to stand in her way!

But there's a problem.

Jesus—the healer, the Rabbi, the Messiah---he **ignores this Gentile woman!**
At her first request, **she is ignored. Literally.**

So she starts with some **mom-savvy language to appeal to Him,**

She recognizes who she's talking to....

Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David.

This is a smart move on her part.

But Jesus doesn't even answer her after that!

And the disciples want to send her away!

Finally Jesus says:

*"I was sent **only** to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."*

Well, that's not going to heal her daughter.

So she kneels at his feet and begs. (remember she's a mom, with a sick kid)

Lord, help me! She says.

Incredibly----Jesus continues to stonewall her.

"It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs."

Wait a minute—did he just compare her to a dog? Oh yes, he did.

But she doesn't give up:

*"Yes, Lord, yet **even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table.**"*

And that's when all her strength and persistence pays off.

Jesus says, **"Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish."**

And her daughter is healed instantly!

There's **a lot going on** in this story.

Jesus for one seems to be having **a bad day**, or just **acting like a jerk**, honestly.

Some commentators say this is because *he is testing her, her strength, her faith.*

But what if this is **about something bigger,**

and not a test for this poor woman

who's probably living on no sleep and lots of anxiety.

What if this story is about **speaking up for those who cannot?**

And **helping those in need,**

advocating for those who need an advocate?

What if this is a call to speak up—and keep on speaking up?

And what if Jesus really is persuaded,
what if he changes his mind because of her tenacity?

Some might say, wait a minute-- he's God, the Messiah, he can't change his mind!
But---he's fully God and **fully human**.

And we know throughout the Gospels that he is **often moved with compassion, and even righteous anger**.

So, if Jesus really changes his mind here—what does that mean for us?

I think it's great news!

And **what changes** his mind?

Is it that he's tired of **hearing** her?

Or is it her **persistence, her tenacity?**

Her **humility** as she kneels and begs for help?

Is it her **strength**, to advocate for her helpless daughter?

And her **un-willingness** to be ignored?

Or **ALL OF THE ABOVE?**

This story reminds me of the parable Jesus tells
of a **widow who demands justice from an unjust judge**—
by knocking on his door all night until he gives it.
He tells the story to encourage **persistence in prayer**, in Luke 18.

What if Jesus has a lot of **respect for those who persist?**

For those who **speak up?**

For those who are **humble enough to care more for others** than themselves?

In fact, the Gospels show that he calls his followers to just that kind of life—
a life of **strength, humility, determination, and persistence**.

There's a great children's book called ***She Persisted: 13 American Women Who Changed the World***—and in its pages are the profiles of women like Harriet Tubman, Ruby Bridges, Helen Keller, Nellie Bly, and more.

All women who persisted in doing what was right, against all odds.

It makes me wonder—do we persist?

Do we ***stand up*** for those without a voice?

Do we ***speak up, humbly seeking what is good and right, for those in need?***

Do we persist—when God seems to be silent?

Jill Duffield in the Presbyterian Outlook commentary this week put the question this way: Instead of WWJD? What Would Jesus Do?

She asked ***WWTCWD? What Would the Canaanite Woman Do?***

What would this mom do?

She would speak up for those ***without a voice***, those who are ***hurting***, those in ***need***, those who are ***left out***, or ***left behind!***

Do WE do that?

For whom are we speaking up today?

Where are we showing ***persistence***—in seeking help for others?

This is not an easy question.

It's one thing to seek help for a sick child.

But I think this ***story is bigger*** than that, don't you?

What about speaking up for ***someone you don't know?***

For someone of a different race, or gender, or class?

Isn't she our role model for that, too?

The easy way out is to say, ***that doesn't concern me.***

That doesn't affect my group, ***let them take care of themselves.***

But friends, ***nothing could be further from a life of following Jesus Christ.***

Jesus brought ***help, healing and hope*** to ***ALL marginalized people***—

those that others left out or left behind:

lepers, prostitutes, tax collectors, demon possessed, even women.

If we are to follow in his footsteps, ***aren't we called to do the same?***

And if we find ourselves with ***excuses***,

Aren't we ***called to be like Jesus in this story—and have our minds changed?***

Maybe we think ***we aren't called to any kind of activism or change***,

But think about it like your sick child.

Or a neighbor, or someone you just met.
 Think about all the people who are ***being mistreated today***—the list is so long!
 If they are of a *different color, or gender, or class*—
 are we really going to just say no—that's ***THEIR PROBLEM?***
 Can we ***live with ourselves*** if we do that?

Our nation is reeling from ***racial injustice***.
 From ***economic injustice***.
 People are ***not treated fairly***, and not everyone has a place at the table where
 decisions are made.

Will we ***step*** up?
 Will we ***speak*** up?
 Will we ***stand*** up again, and again, and again?
 Like the Canaanite woman—will we ***persist***?

Acting on behalf of others, with the same tenacity
 as a mom seeking help for her sick child?

My prayer is that ***we will do just that***.
 Because, we each have ***influence***.
 We each have a ***little corner*** of the world where people pay attention to us.
 We are ***each role models*** for someone else.
 The question is---***WHAT KIND WILL WE BE?***

Maybe we need to ask **What Would the Canaanite Woman Do?**

Friends, Hear the ***Good news*** of the Gospel:
What Would the Canaanite Woman do?
 She would ***persist in seeking help for anyone, and everyone in need***.
 May we do the same.
 And for the strength to do that, let all God's people say, Amen.