

**Proper 18, Year B**

- Grew up in UMC, but in high school and following (in military), experimented with religion - tried out variety of different denominations, incl. RC, evangelical Baptist/nondenom
- Have experience in traditions that view faith somewhat like the famous poem by Alfred, Lord Tennyson, "The Charge of the Light Brigade":
- Know one I mean?
- More specifically, referring to the part that goes, "Theirs not to make reply, Theirs not to reason why, Theirs but to do and die."
- A lot of people seem to think faith is like that, right? Ours not to make reply, ours not to reason why, ours but to do and die?
- A lot of us were probably raised to think of our faith like that - not to make reply, not to reason why
- Love passages like the Gospel today because they show us how wrong that notion really is
- Famous passage - story appears both here in Mark and in Matthew (though Matthew calls the woman in his version a Canaanite, rather than a Syrophenician)
- Essentially the story of a woman who didn't take no for an answer, even from God incarnate
- This unnamed woman (called Justa in early church tradition, though this name doesn't appear until at least 3rd C) has a daughter who is possessed by a demon, and she has heard of Jesus, knows the power he has to work miracles, and asks him to do the same for her
- And his answer is, essentially, "Charity begins at home" - says in Mt 15:24 "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel"
- Only his answer doesn't sound even that nice in Mark's version - "Let the children be fed

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

- Jesus rebukes her, saying basically, "I've come for God's chosen people Israel"
- But as I mentioned, she doesn't take no for an answer, instead replying, "even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs"
- In other words, sure even those traditionally considered outside the realm of God's mercy, God's providence, are able to get by on what remains after God's chosen are fed
- This is a reading that people struggle with for this reason: it's difficult to hear Jesus refer to someone as a dog, particularly a person in need, whose daughter is suffering
- But think of this: It's only because of his rebuke and her further reply that we have one of our most famous prayers, one of many people's favorite prayers in the entire BCP, one of my absolute personal favorites: Prayer of Humble Access
- Without this exchange, we would not be able to pray the following:
- We do not presume to come to this thy Table, O merciful Lord, trusting in our own righteousness, but in thy manifold and great mercies. We are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under thy Table. But thou art the same Lord whose property is always to have mercy. Grant us therefore, gracious Lord, so to eat the flesh of thy dear Son Jesus Christ, and to drink his blood, that we may evermore dwell in him, and he in us.  
*Amen.*
- It's a fantastic prayer for two different reasons - first, reminder that we didn't get here on our own merit - in a sense, every one of us is that Syrophenician woman - every one of us comes to God in need, and without having earned God's love or mercy
- But the second part of the Prayer of Humble Access is equally remarkable: "thou art the same Lord whose property is always to have mercy."
- The prayer serves almost like a reminder to God of who God is

- And if that sounds foreign to your ears, I have an Old Testament lesson I'd like you to listen to
- Unfortunately, not the passage we heard just a bit ago - if I could, if I were in charge of arranging the lectionary, I'd actually pair this passage with a different reading from Isaiah, one from ch. 62, vv. 6-7: "Upon your walls, O Jerusalem, I have posted sentinels; all day and all night they shall never be silent. **You who remind the Lord, take no rest, and give him no rest until he establishes Jerusalem and makes it renowned throughout the earth.**"
- God tells us (even commands us!) to remind God of who God is
- That's the example, the role model, the Syrophenician woman is for us
- She is a prophet, and she's exactly the kind of prophet we need, who serves as an intermediary between God and humanity - telling us the ways we've fallen short and pleading with God to be faithful
- She reminds us of our own unworthiness - serves as a warning against the sin of pride - she who was willing to be called a dog for the sake of her daughter, for the sake of expanding the circle of God's love and mercy
- and she calls upon God to be faithful, to remember that God is a God of mercy, to remember God's own faithfulness
- It's lovely that that prayer, the Prayer of Humble Access, is in Rite One said right before we approach God's table
- In it, just before we partake of the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ, God's son, we remind ourselves of our humility, and we pray to God to remind God to be as God has always been - loving, kind, merciful
- It is beautiful, I think, that as we approach the table we should follow the example of this

one famous-and-yet-nameless woman, this prophet willing to argue with God

- this woman who recognized her own unworthiness even as she knew, down in her bones, the depths of God's grace
- Maybe by so doing, we can all someday be brave enough to recognize our own finitude, and to argue with God about injustice, reminding God of who God is, and what God has promised, and of God's unfathomable love and mercy