

## **"A Faith With Some Size"**

Matthew 15:21-28

August 17, 2008

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About six months ago Suzanne and I had supper with Jane and Jim McKinney. It was a good evening with good food and good company. The best thing about the evening was that Jane and Jim said, "Yes!" There was a reason we were having supper, and they knew the reason ahead of time. Still, they were gracious and said, "yes" when I asked them if they would serve as the chairs of our "We Would Be Building" Committee. I appreciate their leadership and appreciate the leadership of the Committee and those of you who have worked on the Capital Campaign. I appreciate each of you who are here this morning. We met earlier this morning and someone at that meeting said, "Just by your presence here today, you are saying yes to what we are doing." If you can make some kind of pledge for the next three years that's wonderful, but if you cannot do that, just by your presence here you are saying that you are supporting what we are doing and you will keep the church in your prayers.

I have been appreciative the past few weeks as I have read lectionary scriptures on Sundays like today's. Often these scriptures seemed to fit with what we were doing. Today's scripture, at first glance, might not seem to do this. This is a Jesus that we don't recognize and maybe a Jesus that we don't like a whole lot. His treatment of the woman seems harsh to say the least, doesn't it?

You remember what happened. The woman comes to Jesus after he has traveled into Gentile territory, seeking his help for her daughter who is possessed by a demon. In some versions of the Bible we read that he does not say a word to her. Jews and Gentiles have no dealings. Still, she is persistent. Jesus says, "I was called only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." Then the disciples, in their usual helpful, compassionate way say, "Send her away! She's shouting after us." Some versions say, "she's shrieking."

The woman is unrelenting. She kneels in front of Jesus and says, "Lord, help me." Jesus' response doesn't seem like Jesus, does it? "It is not right to give the children's food to dogs." Jesus, did you really just call this woman a dog? Understand this about Gentiles and Jews. It's hard for us to understand the extent of the enmity. It's worse than cats and dogs, Sooners and Cowboys, and Democrats and Republicans. These people hated each other. Yet still the woman persists, "But even the dogs get the crumbs

from their master's table."

What a surprising response from Jesus: "Because of your great faith," Jesus says. Remember last week the story of Simon Peter trying to walk on the water. When he sinks, Jesus says to Simon Peter, "O ye of little faith." Now he says this woman has great faith. What is it that makes her faith great? Is it her clever repartee, back and forth with Jesus? Is it her unwillingness to give up? Is it the fact that she loved her daughter so much? Perhaps a part of all of those things, but there's something else far more important.

The woman had great faith because she taught Jesus that day. She taught the teacher. Jesus grew in his faith that day. At first, "My message is just for the lost sheep of the house of Israel. It's not come one, come all." Then, after speaking with this woman, "My message is for all children because all children are God's children." Jesus grew in his faith that day. Perhaps he understood, in a way that he really never had, what God wanted him to do.

If Jesus needed to grow in his faith, let me ask you this, how do you need to grow in your faith? What is God trying to say to you about how you can grow in your faith? How can you have a faith with some size? In order to have a God with some size, we have to have a faith with some size. Do you remember the words of the hymn, "There's a wideness in God's mercy that is wider than the sea; there's a kindness in God's justice that is more than liberty."

How often we settle for less, don't we? We hang on to some notion that God is some kindly, old gentlemen. Either that, or an image of God as a bookkeeper, someone who is keeping up with all that we do wrong. Or even some kind of a cop with a billy club who is just waiting to hit us over the head. We settle for less.

Instead of settling on a God who is wider than the Pacific Ocean, we settle for a God the size of a mud puddle in our front yard. Instead of a God who is like Michael Phelps, swimming at that place called "The Cube," we settle for ol' Jethro doing the dog paddle in a farm pond. Instead of the Olympics at Beijing, we settle for a Junior High track meet at McAlester. We settle for a lesser God because our faith has no size.

We believe in a God who offers wholeness and healing to us just as he offered wholeness and healing to this woman's daughter. That is the bottom line of this story. We get all caught up in the conversation of Jesus and the woman. This is a story of Good News, the woman's daughter was healed. So God offers this same healing to us, just as God also offers hope, forgiveness, a pat on the back when we need encouragement, or a kick in

the tail when we need to get going.

This same God offers a vision to us, a dream if you will. We have a dream that in our church we can build God's church in a new way. Our capital campaign is completely different from most capital campaigns. Most capital campaigns are about building walls—a sanctuary, an education building, classrooms, a family-life center, a hospital, a seminary. Invariably, even though we don't mean it, when we build those walls somehow it seems that some of God's children end up being excluded. This capital campaign is about tearing down walls, the walls that divide us. This capital campaign is about building lives, the lives of people who provide us the opportunity to share our faith, the faith that God has shared with us.

"We Would Be Building." We would be building to reach out to people who are not now a part of this fellowship. We would be building to reach out to a family who has little children who have never heard the story of Mary, Joseph, and the Baby Jesus, who don't know that Jesus loves the little children, all the children of the world. We would be building the life of a person who has given up on life; down on life, down on themselves, up on drugs, up on destroying themselves. We would be building.

Oh keep us building Master, let the deed never falter when the dream is in our hearts. Give us, God, a faith with some size. Today is the day for us to make commitments that will enable us to build this church, to build God's church, to build up the lives of those who have given up on life. O, keep us building. Amen