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Sermon Notes: August 20, 2017
St. Martin's-in-the-Field Episcopal Church
Proper 15A
Matthew 15:21-28

And his disciples came and urged him, saying, 'Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us.'

Understand where the story starts:

- Jesus and his disciples just had a run-in with the Pharisees in the land of Gennesaret...
- They leave that place (the people were bringing those who were sick and ill and possessed to him and even just touching the fringe of his garment healed people instantly).
- So after what must have been a crushingly busy time for both Jesus and his disciples, they leave that place, they move on...probably hoping to get a bit of peace and quiet in a new land—in the territory that was not part of Israel, a place where maybe Jesus' popularity and the demand for his touch, healing, might not be so intense.

So when the Canaanite woman comes wailing at them her *kyrie eleisons* (Lord have mercy) non-stop they get agitated, down right angry with her.

Look at who says what:

Disciples: "Lord, send her away."

- want to maintain the status quo
- don't deal with her, ignore her, send her away,
- make her go away so we don't have to deal with her,
- Lets just go on being on vacation, please.
- She is not worth our time or yours Jesus.

Jesus agrees with them and answers the disciples, basically saying—my job is to take care of my people, not her kind. My mission is to the house of Israel, only.

What was her kind? She is described as a Canaanite woman from that region

- No Canaanites left in 1st century Palestine,
- So for the Jewish hearers of Matthew's gospel account she represents something that had deep-seeded and rooted meaning: she was not only "other" she was "despised, wicked, and worthy-of-being-put-to-death, other."

This all comes from way back when Moses was addressing the Israelites before they finally entered into the Promised Land. Here's what Moses had to say as recorded in Deuteronomy chapter 20...now remember that

Moses is speaking for God here. He says: *“But as for the towns of these peoples that the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance, you must not let anything that breathes remain alive. You shall annihilate them—the Hittites and the Amorites, the Canaanites and the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites—just as the Lord your God has commanded, so that they may not teach you to do all the abhorrent things that they do for their gods, and you thus sin against the Lord your God.”* (Deut. 20:16-18).

AND YET, this woman comes to Jesus with both the hope that he will help her AND the certainty of faith that Jesus CAN heal her daughter. She comes crying, “Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David.”

Combines words with actions: Kneels in front of Jesus.

- she is moved to action.
- She does so just as other outsiders in Matthew’s gospel have done with Jesus from the very start of his life—remember what the Magi do when they finally arrive and find the Christ child...what do they do? They kneel before him.
- This hated outsider recognizes what Jesus’ own disciples seem to not yet understand: Jesus is not just the hope for the house of Israel. Jesus is the hope for the whole world.

She puts her faith into action by doggedly standing her ground with Jesus, speaking truth to power—even the ultimate power of the Almighty present as Jesus. She knows that even the crumbs that fall from the table are all she needs...even just a few crumbs will make the difference to her daughter that suffers.

With her faith she stands her ground.

And the words that Jesus speaks to her at the end of our passage are unparalleled in the whole of the New Testament. Jesus says, “Woman, great is your faith!” Nowhere else in all of the New Testament does this conjoined adjective appear.

In that instant where the combination of recognizing the power of Jesus, standing her ground, and speaking truth to power, the miraculous, merciful, and life-giving healing of Jesus is granted.

This past week our nation, like many of us I’m sure, has again been jolted into the reality of the persistent presence of evil in our world. This evil turned violent and three lives were lost, many injured, and our nation was left numb, grieving, outraged...with heavy hearts and questions about who we are as a people and a even a nation.

I do not care about the political side of the events in Charlottesville. What I do care about is that as disciples of Jesus, as Christians in America, as Episcopalians, as people who live here...we need to figure out what our faith tell us, and demands of us.

We need to figure out our own words and actions when we come face to face with hatred, bigotry, supremacy, or ideologies that trumpet or even support supremacy or the use of power against the poor, the wounded, the lonely, the homeless...

We are to confront those forces with the great faith and the perseverance of the Canaanite woman.

We are to confront those forces with the proclamation of the truth of our Gospel which teaches love and “come to me all who are weary and carrying a heavy burden and I will give you rest,” Which proclaims that God so loves the world that he gave his only begotten son to the end that all who believe in him should not perish but have everlasting life.”

No matter if the voices of hatred are persistent in their attempts to silence us, we need to remember that we are armed with a greater force than hatred...and that we have made a covenant with God in Christ at the very moment we were made Christians.

At our baptism these promises were part of that grafting into the body of Christ, part of our redemption and our charge to carry out as those who follow Jesus:

Will you persevere in resisting evil, and , whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord?

Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being? (BCP p. 304-5)

Confronting these forces that are alive and clearly thriving in our world—even in our community—maybe even within our own family—is never easy...is never simple. Confronting those forces of supremacy and racism is always for Christians a holy an act of great faith. And, standing firm against those forces, WILL, as the baptismal covenant states, inevitably and almost CERTAINLY require God’s help.

What we may not do is to remain silent when we are confronted with these forces of evil. Standing back, or politely ignoring, or simply not doing anything at all is easier to be sure, but our silence is not congruent with our faith...as Christians....as members of the body of Christ.

As perhaps many of you know, The Episcopal Church has long been at the forefront--and a loud voice of justice and love in this country--opposing evil while speaking out for those on the margins of our society. This is especially true when it has come to issues of gender, race and sexual identity.

However, more often than not it seems, that voice that denounced violence, hatred, idolatry, discrimination and disenfranchisement has become a voice of assimilation and smoothing over the rough patches. Mostly, I would assume, because that is just easier than dealing with the reality of the presence of evil in our midst.

Our lives are difficult and complicated enough without having to worry about THEM, or anyone else. That sounds an awful lot like "Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us.' and, 'I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel'," to my ears.

Our faith demands that, like the Canaanite woman we will not be silenced, or put off. Because, like her, we know that Jesus has the power and is the answer to the ills that we see put front and center in our world. My brothers and sisters, we must put our faith and our words into action.

This past week received many emails about Charlottesville and all that transpired after. The most often asked question was: What can we DO? What ACTION can we take, now?

What we are doing as The Church:

1. Letter from Bp. Sutton
2. Action points from Bps. In VA (<http://www.thediocese.net/news/virginia-bishops-on-charlottesville-what-we-saw-what-you-can-do/>)

"Concrete actions in the face of white supremacists and others whose message is counter to Christ's embracing love."

1. Be clear about the issues. Make distinctions of the following kinds:
 - All individuals and groups in this country have a right to free speech. Individuals and groups do not have a right to assault, attack or cause violence against anyone else based on their views - or for any reason.
 - As Americans and as the Church, we believe that inclusion of all persons in our common life is central to our identity. We seek to welcome and include all people. We understand that there is a wide range of legitimate perspectives on the issues that are most important to us. We do not, however, welcome, include or legitimize all behaviors and all words. Some words and actions are simply not acceptable. We need to keep making distinctions about what behaviors and actions we will not tolerate.
2. Write to your elected representatives
 - Urging them to enact legislation to track hate crimes in the Maryland. As it stands now, we do not have the tools we need as citizens to track what seems to be an escalation of violent acts and therefore to respond appropriately.

3. Create conversation groups in which you can get to know people from different backgrounds or with different political perspectives from your own. Talk to one another. Listen deeply to one another. We as a society have forgotten how to talk and listen openly. We in the Church can help rediscover the skills.

4. Pray. Pray alone and in groups. Join in the prayers of those who pray from different traditions or styles from your own. Hearing the prayers of others can expand and deepen our own praying.

- For the civic and religious leaders of Charlottesville, for all citizens of Charlottesville, for all the people who live and work in the Charlottesville area.
- For those who died in Charlottesville on Saturday: Heather Heyer, Lt. H. Jay Cullen, Trooper-Pilot Berke M.M. Bates, and for their families.
- For all who were injured in violence in Charlottesville on Saturday.
- For those with whom we disagree.
- For peace in our nation and in the world.

5. Do a moral inventory of yourself. How do you feel about free speech? Are there limits? If so, where do they lie? What is not acceptable? What resonance do you have with exclusionary rhetoric either on the right or on the left? As Jesus said, take the log out of your own eye and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor's eye.

6. White people, speak out against white supremacy. It is we white people who must speak to white supremacists to make clear that we do not agree with them, that they do not speak for the "white race." Our silence will be heard as complicity.

What we are doing here at St. Martin's.

Renew our continued partnership with St. Philips: book study, upcoming diocesan training about racial reconciliation, upcoming speaker.

Here at St. Martin's : Education for us about race, understanding or trying to understand the African American history, culture, how things are now: Crossing Many Rivers movie series.

If we are to have that great faith of the Canaanite woman, we must confront evil wherever we encounter it, not being silenced, not stopping until the message of truth and love of the Gospel wins.

As Christians we must put our own great faith into action, now, today. I challenge each of you to do one thing every day this week that helps change the world and brings the love of God in Christ closer to those who need to hear that message the most. Pray, write a letter, take a stand, don't tolerate racism when you see or hear that evil.

Now is our time to be the body of Christ in action, to preach the gospel with vigor—to claim our faith as stronger and better than hatred and violence. Let us show our community and the world our own great faith...now.

AMEN.