

Lenten Sermon: Archdeacon Wendy Scott, 2nd week of Lent 2019

- 00:00 Kia ora tātou te whānau Te Karaiti, nau mai, haere mai, haere mai, welcome to our space here at St. John's. Ko Wendy Scott tōku ingoa. It's my privilege to bring to you this message today. So as we begin I'd love to be able to pray with you. Father God we pray by Your Holy Spirit that we would be moved through these words today that you would speak through me and that together as the people of God we can hear what your Spirit is saying to our church in Jesus' name, amen.
- 00:32 When people gave me the opportunity of preaching they said, "Ooh yay, you've got the Canaanite woman!" And then I read it and I thought, "Oh no...really? It's not a text that I'm particularly fond of. And I often think about what the picture we have of Jesus is, and the picture that I love to carry with me is this loving caring nurturing image of who he represents through God.
- 01:05 And yet today in the Gospel reading we see a different Jesus. And so for me it's like meeting him on a bad hair day and he's gotten really grumpy and I guess if you understand some of the context about that then you might understand how this story is set. But I'm just always conscious that when we see Jesus acting or speaking out or doing miracles we see the Father.
- 01:37 So this picture of a grumpy Jesus, and a Jesus who wants to ignore this woman and her plea, it doesn't sit comfortably with many of us and certainly doesn't sit comfortably with me. And so therefore I've had to do some serious context setting to understand what's going on here. And if you could understand that Jesus has gone to another place, again it's the gospel on the move.
- 02:07 And he's gone to Tyre and Sidon which we know historically is outside of Israel's border. It's a place where the others live. It's not his people. And here he is confronted by... and he's gone there primarily (before we talk about the confrontation) He's gone there primarily because he's, as I read it, He's annoyed with his sheep. He's been trying to talk to the Pharisees,
- 02:37 the disciples aren't perhaps functioning as he'd want them to function and he has decided that in a sense he's had enough and he's gone to the other place to maybe have a break and maybe get away from it all. And here he is confronted by a Canaanite woman. Now she comes on her own. So she's not coming with her husband, she's not in a community, it just says she fronts up to Jesus and His disciples on her own in this place.
- 03:10 And we know that the Canaanites are a group of people who within the Old Testament were held to be slaves to the Israelites. So if you could imagine every single barrier that is being faced by this woman she is living it. It's geographical, it's historical, it's political, it's ethnic based, and certainly the biggest obvious choice is that she is gender opposed to this.
- 03:39 You know, women weren't supposed to be out on their own and pleading of a male teacher. So you've got to, I think you've got to acknowledge the tenacity of this woman as she seeks this man that she's heard about. And she's obviously heard of him because she goes to him with expectation in her heart.

- 04:05 And I want you to see and hear the desperation in her voice and picture her: picture her coming up to Jesus and she's on her own. In what for him is a foreign land and she says to him, "Have mercy on me. Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me. Help me." Such is her desperation as she seeks healing for her daughter.
- 04:37 And I think that what she's done is she's looking for an in with Jesus. So she's using words that mean something to him. So when she says, "Have mercy on me," it's a referral back to the laments through the Psalms. So she's using language that he understands. She addresses him as Lord.
- 05:03 She says, actually I've heard about you, I know what you're capable of. And when she calls him Son of David she says, you are the King. There is a kingly line here. And I know who you are and I know what you're capable of so I'm coming to you. Desperate. Will you help me? And how many of us as parents would do that for our children. As they suffer as they are not growing up to be the people that we know that they can be.
- 05:37 How many of us have got down and said to Jesus, "Lord have mercy on me. Help me. I need your help with my children." And it's her desperation that drives this whole story. And as we go into it, she four times she approaches him, four times she will not leave him, she will not walk away, and such is her annoying behaviour that the disciples say, look Lord shall we get rid of her for you?
- 06:10 Really. She's making a whole lot of noise and there's nothing worse than a woman who makes a whole lot of noise. And yet Jesus eventually has a speech with her, essentially at the beginning he's silent, he chooses to ignore her but she just keeps on and on and on and she pushes through. And so he sees her and he has to address her and enter into a conversation. She kneels and humbles herself before him.
- 06:42 She bargains with him. She stands up to him as he talks to her and says look I've come to save the Israelites. They are my children. They are my sheep. And I don't have anything for those outside of that paradigm. And this is where, I love it, it's like she's read the end of Matthew's gospel where Jesus says go out to all the world and make disciples. There is no differentiation. Actually she's read the end of the story and she says,
- 07:12 I demand something, I demand even the crumbs. It's all I need. It's all I need in order to save my daughter. She claims what's hers. She understands enough about the law and what God is responsible for. So we know yes that the Israelites are the coveted people. However we know through Abraham that God's blessings are for all.
- 07:41 And so she's claiming what is rightfully hers. Have mercy on me. Lord, Son of David, help me. She doesn't take no for an answer. She will not be ignored and she pushes past the gatekeepers in order to get Jesus' attention. And here I think about the disciples as maybe a metaphor for our church.
- 08:08 You know how many of us as church leaders pray and as church people we pray that God would open up the gates and the doors of our churches and that people would come in. So we pray that as a church. And yet when people start coming in we'll turn round and say, "Actually no, I didn't mean that one and I certainly don't want that one to sit near me."

- 08:34 That one smells." A common one is, we bring in children. And they say, you know "But they make so much noise!" And I'm just constantly reminded of how many gatekeepers are there in our church who when we pray, Lord send us people, bring them to us, we say yeah but we don't want those ones. Because she's every other person that you could ever imagine in our church.
- 09:08 How open are we to the 'other'? And here again, what's enough? For this woman in need, what is enough? And she says to him, "even the crumbs..." Because when he talks about her as the dog that's not a Jesus sort of common language that he would use about people.
- 09:39 But He's saying look, what I have is for the Israelites. I'm not going to waste it on the dogs. And she says no, I have a right to be at the master's table. And even if it's just the crumbs that is all I need for my daughter. Such is her message that he says woman you have great faith.
- 10:08 Great faith. Now we know in the Bible there's only another one person and he's a centurion who's also not an Israelite. So it's some somehow these people who are the 'others' recognize who He is, they have great faith because they ask humbly, in desperation for healing from the Lord. And they have great faith. As opposed to those who have little faith: the disciples,
- 10:38 the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the people who should recognize him. I want to be part of that great faith. I wish my faith was that great, that when we ask of the Lord our faith is such that he heals those that need healing. And I guess all of that context helps us to say, so what does it mean for me? As I sit in the pews, or as I lead a church, or my day to day stuff,
- 11:10 what does it mean? What does the Canaanite woman story mean for me? How will I change my behaviour because of what I've experienced in this story? And I wondered about our need to be bold, to stand up and be counted and to have our voice heard as we plead for those around us.
- 11:38 So how many of you have desperate people in your life, or who for whatever reason their lives have gone to crack. And it's like, what do we do? I don't know what to do. And our role as people of faith is to say, "Look, I know of someone who will help you. And his name is Jesus. Can I tell you about him?" Because this woman had heard about him and she came to him.
- 12:09 So unless we share the story of who Jesus is with our friends and our families in need, then we're missing opportunities for giving Jesus an option to work and an opportunity to work into people's lives and to heal them and to make them whole. Which is his whole message. Our response:
- 12:37 Should we choose to accept the challenge of what it means to be people of faith is to be bold in our faith to have a great faith. To search on behalf of our friends who are desperate and to offer them that opportunity to say, "I know of a man. Who can help. Can we pray together?" And if they say "I don't know how to pray," well you pray for them.
- 13:05 And it's that desperate prayer that Jesus recognizes. So in desperation we come to our Lord and we seek healing and we seek wholeness on behalf of those who are in need. And if you're a gatekeeper in your church, and you start to say actually I don't like that person, I don't like that person,

- 13:27 and I don't want that person here, think twice. Because these are the people who need the Jesus story more than perhaps maybe even you and I, I don't know. But release that, ask for the Lord to let that go of you. Because in a sense we don't need more gatekeepers in our church, what we need is gate openers. Is gate welcomers who will bring the 'other' in, who will not make barriers for them.
- 14:00 Because there's enough barriers in this world already to hearing who Jesus is and what our gospel message is, don't let us be yet another barrier. So as we come to a close today I want you to remember that she was the Canaanite woman was just a woman who wanted what they had. Who needed what the Israelites had but who chose to ignore it. Be open to your friends and family, to your work colleagues, to people you meet on the street because they in fact need what we have.
- 14:40 So I want to pray and I want to remember these words. Lord, Son of David. Have mercy on me. Lord, Son of David, save us. Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us as your church.
- 15:03 Help us to be the people you know that we can be. Help us to tell your story, to bring about your justice, your healing, and your wholeness. Amen.