

SERMON

Matthew 15:21-28

Pull God's Mask Down

Nunawading and Waverley, 16-8-20

Dear friends in Christ,

How menacing we look with a mask on. Some are sinister and black and all we see are eyes. People look like bandits. Sometimes Jesus wore a metaphorical face mask, not acting his usual self.

He wasn't listening. He ignored the woman. Sometimes we wish we could give our Lord a Cochlear implant! A problem goes on and on and even gets worse. The people of Lebanon have put up with corrupt, useless governments and suffered. People in West Papua, mostly Christian, have endured Indonesian racism and slow genocide. In the CAR, mainly Christian people have been attacked by Fulani herdsmen supplied with weapons by ISIS. Why do the saints have to keep on pleading for help and God does not act?

The woman mentioned in the gospel was a Gentile, called a **Canaanite**, a particularly derogatory term. I have already mentioned how Jews completely rejected them, except when they became proselytes. Jesus rejected this woman three times: **he did not answer her a word**, he told her he **was sent to the lost sheep of Israel**, and the third time said **it was not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs**. Rejection, rejection, rejection.

What we have to do is unmask God. Behind the mask is our loving, heavenly Father. The mask could be a mental illness, a sick child, unemployment, becoming debilitated with old age, too much work or bullying at school. The mask of God is when we plea for help but are met by silence; **not a word**. It feels like rejection and we can think, "I am not important enough to be noticed, I am just cannon fodder."

This unnamed woman can teach us a lot. We read: **A surprising thing happened; a Canaanite woman came forward from that area. She**

cried out saying, “Have mercy on me Lord, son of David. My daughter is badly hurt by a demon.” She came out of her house and waylaid the Lord Jesus. She had no right to accost him, a Jewish man and a rabbi. First lesson, don't wallow in victimhood and self-pity. Get out, step aside from your situation, and interrupt the Lord. Step out of your predicament and begin praying. Go to a park, find a quiet room. Stop what you are doing and bring your case to the Lord, describing the situation and the help you need.

The disciples were coming up to him, imploring him, “Get rid of her! She keeps shouting at us.” Never take no for an answer because with God, no is never the answer. Jimmy Barnes, the singer, was often beaten by his father. He wrote angrily that God didn't do anything and so he doesn't believe in him. A crappy parent is not God's fault. That is just plain sin at work or the devil. Jesus has borne our abuse, our agony, our worry and despair. So, never storm off and reject our Lord Jesus. **Keep shouting after him.** Enlist the help of others. The woman confronted Jesus' deputies, since she couldn't break through to him. “You ask him for me”, she demanded. All they could do was to tell Jesus to **get rid of her**. Don't be alone with your problem. Come to the church, share it with the saints and let them intercede for you.

Having got through she knelt before him saying, “Lord, help me.” She got past the nay-sayers, all the negative people. Don't listen to people who tell you to give up or they start saying it is your fault. How often people have said of an abused woman, “why doesn't she just leave him?” There are so many unhelpful people, unhelpful medicos, unhelpful bureaucrats, unhelpful legal people, always blocking your way. Keep looking for answers. The Holy Spirit wants you to find them, he wants you to have the help you need. He wants you to pull his mask down and respond.

People all over the world, at that time, believed in healing: there were Jewish groups of travelling healers, there were Gentile healers and healers associated with idols, oracles and priests doling out their healings. What did this Tyrian or Sidonian actually believe? Jesus was

drawing out her faith, making sure she really did trust him. And her answer? **“Yes Lord”, she said, “but the puppies eat from the crumbs that fall from master’s table.”** She believed that Jesus’ love and compassion and his power to help her was so great, that there could be something left over for her. She broke through the silence and the rejection. She fully unmasked her Lord, which is what Jesus wanted her to do all along. Congregation, behind the hours of worry and terrible days and nights you sometimes experience, there is Jesus. Maybe there will be a miracle, maybe he will lead you to help or maybe you will find a way to live with it and even make something of it. Keep demanding a response and unmask the Lord.