

Sermon: Don't Give Up Until You Get What You Need! - Matthew 15:21-28
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Sunday, September 17, 2017

Following the Stockley & Smith Verdict, which was released on September 15, 2017

Throughout human history of these United States, people of African descent have always had to go far beyond our white sisters and brothers in order to be heard and have our basic needs met. We've always been forced to lift our vote and voice to demand attention to our needs of justice and what it takes to meet those needs. Though we've been forced to assimilate into a world that's is shaped by sin, bigotry, racism, injustice and more, we've never gave up on fighting for our humanity, for what is right and the needs of our people. Again, people of African descent have always had to go far beyond our white sisters and brothers in order to get our needs met. We've always had to do more, study harder and be smarter just to compete. We've always had to successfully raise our families and thrive under enormous amounts of systemic oppression, depression and toxic stress. We've prayed, persevered and protested. We've shouted, sang and stood up against evil and systems when needed. We even had to consistently trust God during those times in our communal life when we couldn't trace God.

Sisters and brothers, we come from a people who don't allow anything to prevent us reaching God's best for our lives, families and communities. For it's understood in our community that we don't take no for an answer from anyone or anything, but instead we keep pressing on until what we need comes to pass. Whatever we need from God, whether it's something personal, spiritual, emotional, cultural, sociopolitical, physical, financial, communal or ecclesial, we're challenged to stay the course until it comes to pass. Our hope for justice can't be hijacked or jeopardized simply because something or someone is denying access to what we

desire. Nevertheless, I come on this good Sunday morning, the Sunday following the verdict of the Stockley and Smith case, to serve notice to the enemies of our world, that we're going to keep fighting and showing up until our needs are met! Church family, I come to encourage each of you today that no matter what continues to happen in our families and communities, it's indeed faithful to keep going until our needs are met. For the sacred text reminds me that if God be for us, who or what shall stand against us? We must keep going!

It's in this short pericope, Jesus and his disciples take an excursion to the Region of Tyre and Sidon, which was part of the province of Syria. The Matthean discourse doesn't explicitly disclose what Jesus and his disciples were doing there, or even why they went there in the first place. However, the text does inform us that when they arrived, Jesus received a visit from a Canaanite Woman. This woman is member of a Gentile community. She's a woman for whom the bible does not deem worthy enough to name, but identifies her by her culture. She's facing issues back home with a demon possessed daughter. She's perhaps wearing a Black Lives Matter shirt trying get the attention of people of power and persuasion, which in this case happens to be Jesus and his disciples. This powerful woman is in need and understands that Jesus' identity and ability can meet that need. She's a woman of persistence.

Based upon this text, we can conclude that this powerful woman is in the right place, at the right time, looking for help from the right person (Jesus). During this woman's time of great need, she finds herself in the presence of Jesus. According to the sacred text, somehow the presence of our Christ has always seemed to make a difference in the lives of those in need, and possess the ability to alter one's condition. For example, in Matthew 8:23-27 when the disciples found themselves facing a severe storm on the Lake of Galilee, Jesus rose from his sleep and said to the storm "peace be still". The disciples were in the right place, at the right time, and riding

with the right person. According to the Lukan narrative of Chapter 19, we are told that Zacchaeus wanted to see Jesus enter Jericho. Therefore, he climbs up a sycamore tree and when Jesus passed that way, Jesus saw him and encouraged Zacchaeus to come down, and later joined Zacchaeus in his house. A person who was known for working for a system that would steal from hardworking people began a personal process of transformation. I'm telling you that Zacchaeus was in the right place, at the right time, and with the right person. I remember when I met Jesus from the context and chaos of the Bluemeyer Housing Project in St. Louis. I was just about ready to live an unhealthy life and become a social misfit as a teenager, but my meeting Jesus through His followers and partners, called The Church, transformed my life. When I met them, I can honestly say that it all happened at the right time, in the right place, and with the right folks around me. The Canaanite woman in this morning's text is in the right place, at the right time, looking to get help from the right person, but beyond her surprise her optimism is faced with opposition. Christian friends, what do you do when your hope or anticipation of something good is consistently faced with hurdles and complications?

What's interesting about this passage is that the challenges that this lady is facing is not because of a lack of skills, talents, educational level or anything of the sort, but because of her cultural affiliation. Some of the drama and trauma that we face in our world has nothing do with our ability, skills, work ethic, character, and more, but most times have everything to do with our cultural identity. When reading this passage, I became perplexed and somewhat angry because I could autobiographically identify with this woman, living during times when we're often identified not by a name, our gifts to the community, or by our character, but by the color of my skin, culture, and community. This woman is described in this text not by her name but by her culture, which seems to deem her unimportant and less human than others. This is a woman

advocating on behalf of her own child, and it appears that her problem isn't severe enough to gain the attention of Jesus and even his disciples. What in the world is happening in this text? Surely Jesus should care because Jesus seems to always care about the disenfranchised. What's happening? Surely Jesus cares because he's all about aiding people in being free and whole. So how can we understand Jesus in this text? I believe there are many possibilities. First, Jesus seems to be connected to a culture in which Gentiles were not part of his original mission. Secondly, scholar Douglass Hare in the Interpretation Commentary on Matthew suggest that maybe this text is not so much about Jesus but about the woman's faith, and she's being tested to see how faithful she is. Thirdly, Douglass Hare, goes on to say that this bold woman aids Jesus in broadening his perspective, scope, and mission to all people. You may even have more perspectives to consider.

My friends, there's a woman in need, and Jesus does not answer. To make matters worse, the disciples encourages Jesus to make her go away. They just wanted to push her aside and overlook her needs. Why would the community allow this woman to experience so many hurdles and challenges? I ask God sometimes why God allow African Americans to face so many obstacles in our world of yesterday and today? How might this woman care for her child if the world she lives in don't even care about her humanity? This woman is obviously oppressed by the culture and Jesus' and his home boys seems to not understand how their culture is negatively impacting their response. Perhaps, the writer is trying to show the woman in this text as a figure of humility standing before a powerful Lord. Regardless of the position we take about Jesus or even the status of the woman, what we can't deny is that the woman is **(I) denied access because of her culture.**

Anytime one is defined by their culture and not by their character, one is simply being oppressed. She's oppressed because of her cultural affiliation and perhaps her gender. The text says, "Jesus said to her that he was only sent to the lost sheep of Israel". In other words, he has a mission and just maybe she's not included. It's hard to understand how such harshness can come from Jesus. However, if we compare the text of their time to the many texts of our time, we would be able to testify that we can identify with this woman. There are times in our present world, where it's obvious that we're not included on the agenda. There are times when we're simply overlooked and pushed aside, and as a result we must lift our vote and voice so that those who make decisions on our behalf can understand our needs. Sisters and brothers, we've been ignored for way too long. Our neighborhoods are overlooked and ignored. Our mental health and educational needs are being overlooked and ignored. Health disparities are overlooked and ignored. Our needs for mentorship, enrichment programming for children and reentry programs for ex-offenders are overlooked and ignored. Resources for teenage mothers are overlooked and ignored. The needs for clean and safe neighborhoods are overlooked. In fact, we can travel two blocks right up the street across the "Delmar Divide" to the other side of the Central West End and notice that City services there are not the same as the services we receive right outside our doors or in our zip code. Our community and residents of Fountain Park are overlooked and ignored at times. In fact, qualified black folk in the police department, fire department, city government, and in companies are overlooked and ignored when it comes to promotions. My friends, it's about time for us to continuously raise our vote and voice until we get what is needed. Our humanity is overlooked and ignored. For example, anytime Officer Stockley can engage in pre-meditated murder of an unarmed Anthony Lamar Smith and walk away free, we are overlooked and ignored. Anytime this same officer can have his personal AK47, an assault

rifle that isn't sanctioned by the St. Louis Police Department (SLPD) and shoot Anthony Lamar Smith five times at close range, we are overlooked and ignored. Anytime Judge Wilson allows Officer Stockley to go free without a jury, despite the evidence of the Circuit Attorney of St. Louis, and recommendations of the Ethical Society, the SLPD Black Police Union, we are overlooked and ignored. What I love about the woman in this text is that though she's been identified a certain way, pushed aside and perhaps overlooked, it didn't stop her from demanding and getting what she needed. Though access has been denied, it didn't cause her determination to be diminished. I don't glorify her struggle, but I do appreciate her willingness not to take no for an answer. This woman had faith and courage! This woman was real and had real needs.

My friends, we must show the world that we are human, and that we can't take no for an answer. We have too many needs to address. The problem with so many Christians today is that we focus on the future, other worldly or the "by and by" so much so that we are willing to live in hell-like realities in the "right now". We want peace for the future but fail to ask for peace now. We want justice for the future, but fail to ask for justice now. Though our access has and continues to be denied, we must maintain our determination until our desires are met. What do we need from God right now? What do we need God to do in our family and community right now? What doors do we need God to open right now? What issues do we need God to partner with us to address so that we can be fully free? My friends, I have good news, and that is God will aid every one of us in getting our needs met. Not only is the woman fighting being denied access because of her culture, but she's communicating a request **(II) to address a need that involves all cultures.**

This woman was intentional in her request, but she's also inclusive too, because what she needs, everyone needs. See, her request is not about her being a Gentile, or even Jesus being a

Jew, but it's all about the fact that she has a sick child at home. She's facing a medical crisis at home. This woman understands that her daughter's illness transcends culture. Therefore, she comes back to Jesus after having been denied already asking him for his help, only to be told that his assistance is like taking the children's bread and cast it to the dogs. The woman replies, "Yes, Lord, but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from the master's table." When one reads this passage it becomes troubling because one might assume that the woman has accepted the normative views about her humanity in the society that she lives. Some might even suggest that she's even being made to beg for what should be given freely. Some might even see our people through the lens of this sacred text and how we've been the recipient of crumbs or handouts from those more powerful than us. Though those points of views are troubling and even confusing given the state of our present world, this woman's phrase of "Yes Lord" does two things. It acknowledges Jesus for who she understands him to be, but it also acknowledges that her daughter is sick, and she's trying to aid her in being fully human in this culture as well. Brothers and sisters, there are some things that happen to us in this life that goes beyond the culture that we are a part of. In fact, many of the sicknesses that we face in the world has impacted all cultures. Many of the killings in the streets are impacting all cultures. There's no such thing as black on black crime, it's just crime. Many of the people who are facing mental illnesses represent all cultures. The drama, trauma, and toxic stress is impacting all cultures.

This mother needs help, and she's unwilling to be denied because of her culture. She understands that what she needs from Jesus is representative of a culture that has been denied the ministry and justice that He can offer. What's available to the Jews, she suggests can be for her, her daughter and her people. The blessing that God gives is for every piece of God's creation. All people deserve justice. All people deserve to be loved. All people deserve to live in peace.

All people deserve to play in the park without fearing for their safety. All people deserve to meet God in their experience. All people deserve to be whole. Are you thankful that God doesn't just respect some, but that God loves all? Not only is the woman being denied access because of her culture, she makes request to address a need that involves all cultures. Lastly, the woman **(III) used her power to impact the culture.**

The woman in this text stayed with her request until she got what she needed. She was denied on four occasions, but displayed a faith that she shouldn't have to display to get what she needed. This woman didn't give up the fight until she got what was needed. She remained faithful against all odds. She understood the culture, and didn't let that become a barrier to what she needed. Everyone can learn something from this powerful woman, and that is to consider how might the world we live in seeks to silence our voice. Theologian Brian Blount concludes that this woman's faith is a behavioral model for believers who encounter resistance to the boundary breaking ways of the Kingdom of God. If one does not give up, God will respond. Active faith is needed to overcome the obstacles of this world. We learn that we can't stop just because a few barriers are placed in our way. We learn that if life, wholeness, and peace are what we need, we must continue lifting out voice. We learn that the journey ahead of us might be hard and even a daunting task, but if we take God with us, God will be more than the world against us. We can begin the healing process in our communities today. We can begin the healing processes in our church. We can begin the healing process in our families. We can begin the healing process in our own lives. Whatever you do, don't give in too soon. We must hold on to our faith; our faith can move mountains. Our faith can slay the giants impacting our lives. Our faith can strengthen us for the journey. Our faith can catapult us beyond our conditions. Our faith can build us. Our faith can keep us. Our faith can free us. Whatever you

do, hold on to your faith. For without faith it's impossible to please God. I know it's hard right now, and it feels like we continue to go down this same old path of difficulties and racial injustice in our city. I want to encourage us to remain in the fight until we get our needs met. We must keep lifting our voice and vote until our needs are met. Continue to be non-violent and disrupt the peace of the comfortable. Continue to let the enemies of our world know that we are still here! Walk in faith, children! Stand in faith! Live in faith! It will aid you in getting results. Is there anybody here that's holding on to your faith? Now faith is the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen. Faith and force can set things right. Faith can and will conquer. We will be victorious. We will prevail. Amen!