

The Rev. David Erickson
August 20, 2017

In the name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit Amen.

So although we are not officially in the Easter season, I hope you are aware that as Episcopalians and Christians, every Sunday we actually celebrate and acknowledge Jesus's resurrection. We gather this morning and every Sunday morning to witness to and receive grace from the fact that God came among us, taught us the truth about God and what it means to be truly human, and then conquered death and rose again to invite us to the life abundant. So in this celebration today of resurrection, I'd like to take us on an Easter egg hunt. No, not the Easter eggs that you actually use at Easter that are either plastic and filled with candy, or you've spent some time coloring either with friends or your children. I'm talking about the Easter eggs that in our common culture are found in film television, sometimes video games where creators of such medium will implant or refer to small little secrets that if you are an avid fan you will discover the Easter egg in whatever medium it is. Because you see there are some Easter eggs in our gospel today. And they're there for various reasons of which I'll explain. But discovering, finding these Easter eggs is vitally important for our understanding of the Gospel because without them this Gospel can take a very cruel or indifferent view.

I don't believe that Jesus is here to be cruel or indifferent to the Canaanite woman. I actually believe what he's doing is teaching his disciples a very potent and visceral lesson on the abundant grace and inclusiveness of God. So let's go Easter egg hunting.

First of all, we have this statement from Jesus that he was only sent for the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Well let's look at this for a second. First of all, the disciples are walking with Jesus. This woman is yelling out to them you know have mercy on me Lord that son of David and it is the disciples who are saying will you please get rid of her. We're not sure how but the statement. I was only sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel is not to the woman. It's to the disciples. Here's the problem though and here's why we missed this egg. We don't know our Bibles well enough because we're in the fifteenth chapter of Matthew right now. But if we know it well enough, we know that in the eighth chapter of Matthew Jesus has already healed the Centurion servants. He's already pronounced God's grace and blessing on a non-Israelite seven chapters before, and then immediately after this scripture Jesus goes and feeds four thousand Gentiles. So he's not really claiming a truth here. I think what he's doing is awaking them to what was God's call, so that he can introduce them to what now is God's call. So I don't see this statement really as a definitive fact for all time.

The truth is that perhaps Jesus in his earthly form and mission was here for the Jews. I mean again looking forward because we've got some time to look forward. The full inclusion of the Gentiles didn't come until the Holy Spirit was received by the community and the St. Paul was out and about proclaiming the good news to the Gentiles. But even in Jesus's earthly ministry he couldn't help but share the grace of God with those who are not Jewish. So that's the first thing we have to realize we missed out on because we don't know the context of our Bible. The next Easter egg we missed because partially it's the fault of the Greek translations. And this is the line when the woman says help me. My daughter is sick and he goes it's not right for the children's food to be thrown to the dogs. How many of you have pets. OK. Those of you have pets. Do you really enjoy neglecting your pets? Do you kick them? Do you purposely not feed them for a few days? No. You love your pets. They're a part of your life. You care for them in a unique way. But here's the thing. If you have children you probably take care of your pets differently than you take care of your children. The Greek word here that unfortunately we translate as dogs is actually the term. House dogs. So Jesus isn't referring to stray mutts that are on the street that are feral and fighting for food and trying to

figure out a way to live. He's actually referring to pets that are taken care of by people taking care of generously just in a way that pets are to be taken care of. Not children so he's not claiming that there is no care for the Canaanite woman just that at this moment in time the care is different.

Now the next one is perhaps my favorite Easter egg in the entire New Testament and it's an intentional choice I believe by Jesus but also by the gospel writer of Matthew to shine a light on just how radical God's love is. And it's something that we miss as an Easter egg because 2000 years have separated us. And we don't listen with early first century Jewish ears because you see early hearers of this story would immediately have been caught off guard by the fact that the woman was a Canaanite. That the Gospel of Mark she's referred to as a Syrian Phoenician woman. Matthew intentionally calls her a Canaanite.

And here's what's weird about that at this point in history. Canaan no longer existed. Had been gone for hundreds of years. Sure there was an area that was once Canaan. But but the identity and wholeness of Canaan and what it meant to the Jewish people. Was gone. The best. Example I can give today of what that is it's like saying today that someone is from the USSR you know that area still exists but the USSR as a totality as an enemy. No longer exists. But if you know your Jewish history you know that to the Jewish people the Canaanite people were the ones who were to be destroyed and their lands taken over. So what Matthew is doing here is what Jesus is doing here is a very profound but indirect way saying to the disciples and to the early Christian community. Who were many were Jews. The people that you once thought God said were not in. Well guess what they're in, they too deserve God's grace. Well we discover by this small subtle passage it by naming her as a Canaanite that all are open and available to and can receive God's grace. In fact. This is specifically what happened back then rather than Jewish physicality. It is faith grounded in grace that opens us to the kingdom of God. So let me make this clear. There is no ethnic supremacy in the Kingdom of God. In fact the only supremacy is the primacy of God God's self. No one is excluded. All are welcome in God's kingdom.

And when we align ourselves with God's kingdom and God's grace within God's grace rushes in and here's some other little Easter egg that tells us just how powerful the Canaanite woman's actions were. She was not an Israelite. She was not a Jew. But her statement have mercy on me Lord. Son of David isn't explicit Jewish phrase acknowledging someone as the Messiah. So as a non-Jew she's claiming that Jesus is the one sent by God to save Israel. In our scripture when it uses the word that she knelt before him. The Greek word actually says she worshiped him so she put herself in a right relationship with God with Jesus and because she acknowledged him as the Supreme Being, she was open to and received his abundant grace. So how do we today in our day and age align ourselves with Christ or have faith in Jesus. Well this is a long conversation and we're going to spend several years talking about it so I'll just give you a little bit right now. First I think what we do is we proclaim and practice God's grace corporately and so we do what we're doing right now. We gather as a witness to God's resurrection every Sunday. We also do what several of us did on Friday night and we attended a peace rally out in the city to show the city that indeed voices of faith acknowledge that all humanity is equal and receives equal dignity. And so we find ways as a body as the body of Christ to proclaim God's goodness to the world. But we also proclaim and practice God's grace personally. Routinely.

And for me this is actually the harder part because for each one of us there's someone in our life at some time that we can't stand. They bug us or even worse. We're angry at them and we resent them. And unfortunately if we allow that world, the world of resentment anger and fear to come into our lives. Well then we've denied the grace of God. And so every time you come across someone. Who peeves you who upsets you who you're frustrated with who you're impatient with. Guess what. Those are signs from God not to get angry or resentful but to open yourself to God's grace and practice that by that grace with that specific person. It's tricky but to practice and proclaim this radical love both corporately and personally. This is what it means to be obedient to God. It's what

it means in part to have faith to put ourselves in proper perspective with God. And then with our neighbors that God loves deeply. And when we practice and proclaim this grace, this radical love corporately and personally to God and with our neighbor. Well what we practice, get good at, we'll become experts even and we'll be people individually and corporately who practice the resurrection everyday.