

**Persist**  
**August 16, 2020**  
**Matthew 15:21-28**  
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I hope you feel that sweet, sweet, spirit of God where ever you are today. As we worship in our separate spaces, it is God’s persistent love that holds us tight and keeps us together, no matter what comes our way. Amen.

Our scripture today comes from the gospel of Matthew 15:21-28.

Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, “Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon.” But he did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, “Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us.” He answered, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” But she came and knelt before him, saying, “Lord, help me.” He answered, “It is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs.” She said, “Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.” Then Jesus answered her, “Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.” And her daughter was healed instantly.

The word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God,

This is one of my favorite NT scriptures. In this text a woman marginalized because of her ethnicity, comes before the Lord of Lords and the King of Kings as some of us have called Jesus. At first the woman is ignored and then belittled. Nevertheless, she persisted and got what she needed. I want to speak from the theme, ***Persist***.

In 2017, Senator Elizabeth Warren, objected to the confirmation of Senator Jeff Sessions from Alabama as attorney general. Senator Warren railed against his nomination and continued to talk even when told her comments were inappropriate and not becoming of a senator who was

calling to task another senator. Senator Warren was silenced because she would not be quiet regarding Jeff Sessions' past racist behaviors.

When senate majority leader Mitch McConnell explained why Senator Warren was barred from further speaking at the confirmation hearing, he said, she was asked to stop talking, but ***nevertheless, she persisted***. Immediately, the phrase, ***nevertheless she persisted*** became a rallying cry for women to speak our truths and a demand that women to be seen, heard, and valued. With this rallying cry women were also empowered and embolden to demand equal pay for equal work. Nevertheless, she persisted. And in spite of the cultural bigotry, misogyny, and negative energy around this mother in our text, she persisted.

The Canaanite woman in our story has no name. She could be any marginalized woman, any poor woman, any woman with a chronic illness and no healthcare, any woman of color, disabled woman, a lesbian, a trans-woman, a woman who has been raped, or beaten by a spouse. Here was a woman who was told she didn't matter and her people didn't matter. But never underestimate the power and resilience of a mother. This brown-skinned mother knew Black Lives Matter!

Most of you are familiar with the story. Our Canaanite woman heard about Jesus. She heard that he had gifts of healing all manner of ills and she heard that Jesus could and would feed multitudes of people. This woman was particularly interested in Jesus' gift of healing because her daughter was sick. The text reads that the daughter was possessed by demons. I don't have time to unpack that phrase. But it is not unusual for girls and women who exhibit strong character, or for those who color outside the lines, or those who move to the beat of a different drummer, to be considered demon possessed. But that is another sermon, for another day. We don't know what presenting symptoms the girl had, but momma said she was possessed by a demon. And, word was out, that Jesus could heal baby girl.

Desperate situations call for desperate measures. Momma went to Jesus and was loud about what she needed. Let me say, women of color are often thought of as being too loud. I too have

been told on more than one occasion, that I am too loud. But we will not be silenced for the convenience of our oppressors' while their knees remain on our necks. Amen all by myself.

Momma was loud, but momma was respectful. She gave honor to whom honor was due.

Momma called Jesus by his proper name. She said, *Have mercy on me Lord, son of David*. She knew about Jesus' royal lineage and called **to** Jesus using his proper title *son of David*.

Interesting that those seeking favors from those in power, know to put a handle on the names of those we address; Mr. Brown, Mrs. Smith, Your Honor, Rev. Ms. Ann, Dr. Roberts.

Yet those who have power seldom feel inclined to offer the same level of respect. History of black people in America is filled with white people calling black and brown people by their first names, Joe, Lettie, Jose, Janie or John. Then there are times when we had no name at all, but were only referred to as girl or boy, auntie or uncle. That is why some of us are still sensitive to language and bristle when a three year old or someone young enough to be our grandchild is taught to call us by our first name.

In our story, momma gave Jesus all his props. She shouted, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; She got all this titles in there.

Black lesbian activist Audre Lourde wrote in the *Master's Tools will Never Dismantle the Master's House*, that the first response in stopping a movement is to ignore it. Jesus' first response to the woman was to ignore her. The disciples said, Let's just ignore her and then she will go away and her people will get the message to stay away. The disciples did not want all those undeserving ethnic, brown skinned types coming to Jesus asking for favors. We don't want to see you or hear you, the disciple inferred. But, a good friend of mine would remind us, never underestimate the power of showing up—and showing up and showing up and getting louder and louder until you must be acknowledged.

Momma didn't go away. In fact she persisted. Well, when ignoring doesn't work, maybe tossing insults will get the job done. Jesus told her, it is not fair to take the children's bread and throw it

to the dogs. Wait....did I hear that right? Throw it to the dogs? Who is Jesus referring to as dogs? **Throw** it to the dogs? Some other black woman, who is on edge due to the corona would have taken off her earring right then! For those of you who don't know, when a black woman takes off her earrings, back up cause it's going down.

One white biblical scholar said the woman was not resentful of Jesus' disparaging words. Now, what would make a white male biblical scholar think this woman of color was Ok with being insulted? I say she was mad as hell, but her daughter needed healing.

Not that Jesus needs defending, but he was a product of his culture and his environment. Those of us in the White Fragility study were reminded over the past 6 weeks of cultural norms and behaviors that we unquestioningly embraced and enacted. Yet, now that we look back on our actions we are horrified that we could have believed or said such things, or done such hurtful racist things.

All of us who have been marginalized at some point in our lives have been called everything under the sun. Being called a dog would have been a step up from what some of us and our ancestors were called in the 20th and 21st centuries. Yet, she persisted. Amy-Jill Levine, in the Women's Bible Commentary wrote, ***Here the woman, who is disparaged because of her ethnicity moves forward with her request in spite of Jesus' hurtful words.***

Sometimes we have to plow through the hurt and the pain to achieve our goal. We will endure a lot of garbage, crap, and hurt when our babies and our livelihood are at risk. So she persisted and kept talking. "Yes, Lord, (note the respectful language and title are still present) yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table."

Not only had momma heard that Jesus is the great physician that can heal when the doctors have given up, she also heard that Jesus fed over 5,000 with a few fish and couple of loaves of bread. So if Jesus could feed the multitudes, there was enough food in the kin-dom of heaven to feed the children and the dogs. Somebody say amen. There is no shortage in the kindom of

heaven. There is enough healing..., food..., forgiveness..., kindness..., love..., We serve a God that is more than enough.

Where we mess up in the kin-dom of heaven is believing that some of us are entitled to all that God has in store. We get messed up thinking that if you get what you need, there won't be enough for me. My sisters and brothers, God's blessings are not a zero sum game. There is room at the table for us all.

The mean racist comment, Jesus hurled at momma was acceptable in that time. His 180 degree turn toward healing and wholeness for this woman was radical behavior for his day. In the end Jesus got it right and we see radical love in action. But he willfully went against cultural norms and bigotry of his day.

The message for us today is don't give up when you know what you need. Persist. Don't give up when others try to ignore you, or belittle you, and call you anything but a child of God. Keep moving forward. God's got your back. Persist.

If you know God has a healing for you, claim it in Jesus' name. Don't take no for an answer. Persist.

If you know your child can learn when others say it is hopeless, Someone out there believes in you and your child too. Persist!

If you know, your soulmate is waiting for you, go find them. Keep searching. Persist!

If you are tired of seeing black and brown men and women killed, in prisoned, and disenfranchised, keep marching and holding corporations accountable for their racist actions. Persist!

If you know your forever home has been divinely promised, work hard, save your money, and go after your dream. Persist

If you seek financial healing, cut up the credit cards, stop shopping on-line. God will give you the strength to succeed. Persist

If you seek wisdom, direction and peace of mind, The gospel writer said, ask and it will be given, seek and you will find. Knock and the door will be open to you. Persist!

Don't give up. Keep pushing forward. Persist, when it's hard. Persist when it's scary. Persist when you are alone. Persist my friends. Jesus told momma, great is your faith. Because you refused to take no for an answer, your daughter is now healed. My friends great is your faith and you know what God can do. So persist. And all the people of God said, Amen.