

Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost
August 16, 2026 • 10:30am
Trinity Episcopal Church • New Orleans, LA

The Rev. Robert B. Hadzor

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. You may be seated.

Good morning, good morning. Welcome.

Well, I recently read something by a Catholic deacon about this Canaanite woman that we hear about in our story this morning, and I adapted it a little bit, and I wanted to share this type of prose or this kind of poem with you.

I'm the voice of the Canaanite woman. I have no name, I don't have a history, and not much is written about me, but I do have a voice, and my voice shaped the course of salvation's history. Now, my voice was heard by Matthew and Mark, who were very brave to write down my words, because they dared to record the time that I challenged a man named Jesus of Nazareth, and how I influenced the course of his mission.

Yes, I am the voice of the Canaanite woman. I derided my voice to be heard that day. I had to shout at him because the distance between us was so great.

Me, a Gentile woman, and him, Jesus of Nazareth, a Galilean Jew. Now, my voice carried across that great divide as I called out, have mercy on me, Lord. My daughter is tormented by a demon.

Yes, I called him Lord. Yes, I know I did call him the son of David, for I did know who he was. I knew that he could do things, but the knowledge of this was useless if he was unable to hear my voice.

At first, it seemed as if my voice had fallen short, and I know why. I'm a woman, and I was speaking to a man in public. This wasn't done.

Well, not a Gentile woman, at least. But I was also a Canaanite. My people, we worshipped different gods, and we had a very long history of division between our two groups, a division that went all the way back to the time of Noah.

The Galileans looked down at my people. They usually called us dogs. So, when Jesus did something similar, I couldn't let it bother me.

He was just using the words that he was taught. It was a figure of speech that everyone in his culture used, and it was a name that all of us in my culture were taught to respond to. But an urgency swept through me in that moment.

Nothing would allow me to stand in the way of speaking to him. Not my gender, not our differences, not my politics, not my culture. My voice would not be silenced, for I'm the voice of the Canaanite woman.

Those that followed him that day grew very tired of my voice. They urged Jesus to just keep on moving. They were reminding him where we were, what kind of person I was.

But when he did manage to speak, he told me that he was only there, and he was only sent to the lost sheep of Israel. I was not a lost sheep. I was a dog.

But I persisted. Now, you may be asking yourself, why? Why did I expect an outcome that was practically impossible to happen? Why did my voice keep from being faltered, even when people were trying to silence me? Why did I continue to persist, even against this very public and shameful rejection? Well, one word kept coming to my mind. Mercy.

I knew that Jesus of Nazareth was a man of great mercy. Then I saw my chance. When Jesus began speaking about not taking food from the children and throwing it to the dogs, I seized his own image for myself.

See, I know about dogs. When the Jews saw dogs, they just saw them as unclean creatures that merely roamed the streets and scavenged. But in my culture, the Canaanite culture, we had dogs in our homes.

Ironically, it just so happened that I had recently welcomed a new litter of puppies into my house. So every time that we had a meal, they sat patiently right beside our tables, waiting for when the scraps would fall from our plates onto theirs. This was the image of mercy.

So when Jesus said dog, I didn't take offense. I could have, but for some reason, all I could picture were those dogs under my table. This is why I said, please, Lord, even the dogs eat the scraps that fall from the tables of their masters.

As soon as those words left my mouth, I saw a shift in Jesus's demeanor. My voice had somehow touched something inside of him. My voice had prevailed, his defenses crumbled, and it was almost like he was seeing something for the first time.

He was suddenly reminded that the mercy he shared wasn't just to be confined by these boundaries of our cultures. Those simple puppies under my table touched the heart of the greatest prophet that ever lived. When he spoke again, Jesus used a word to describe my faith, a word that would never be used to describe anybody else's faith.

In all of the stories of Jesus, he said, oh woman, great is your faith. Great. That is the word that Jesus used to describe my faith.

I know I did something spectacular that day. I watched as Christ's mercy was no longer limited to the lost sheep of Israel. In fact, I heard stories about where he went afterwards.

He started going intentionally to the fringes of the society where he welcomed all into the growing flock. As he did for me, he started to do for others. It says that the crowds he met praised the God of Israel once more.

Those were my people, the Gentiles, who were now praising the God of Israel. They received God's mercy because my voice shifted something in the life of Jesus of Nazareth. Yes, I am the voice of the Canaanite woman, and my voice cannot be silenced.

My voice can still be heard across the divide that separates the powerful and the powerless, the weak, those who are excluded by God. Wherever mercy is absent, the story of my voice will be heard, for I am the voice of the Canaanite woman. It's important to remember that all of us in this Christian tradition are the Canaanite woman.

See, we joined this sacred stories when our ancestors, thousands of years ago, cried out to Jesus for mercy. We were the people who remained on the fringes of society and who Jesus radically invited us into something special, and it changed the course of our futures. We've inherited our Christian faith because of God's great mercy.

Mercy is one of the cornerstones of Jesus' ministry, and we see this most vividly when the resurrected Jesus speaks his final words to his disciples, and he says, don't just stay here and speak all of these words to the people of Israel. He said, go out and make disciples of all the nations now. We are the Canaanite woman, but our job is far from over.

Poverty in our world is at an all-time high. 7.2 billion people, that's about 80 to 85 percent of our world population, lives on less than 30 dollars a day. Over this past year, 5 million people were lost because they lacked access to proper medical care.

Right now, 117 million people are displaced due to famine and war. 9 million people are actively seeking asylum throughout our world. There are wars, there are conflicts, Ukraine and Russia, Palestine, Israel, Sudan, Myanmar, and right here in

New Orleans alone, 22 percent of the people who live in our city live under the federal poverty line.

For one person that's living on less than 15,000 dollars a year, for a family of four, it's just 31,000 dollars. 22 percent, that's 213,000 people. It is our responsibility as heirs and stewards of this great faith to continue to raise our voices across the divides that plead for mercy.

It may seem like an impossible task. For me, it looks so daunting. Where do we even wrap our minds around how to start, where to begin? But then I think to myself, just take a moment.

Think about a time when you experienced mercy in your life. Think about a time when someone in your life advocated for something about you, when someone extended to you something when you least deserved it, when someone saw an injustice that was happening and you watched as they stood up. Do you remember how it surprised you? Do you remember how it changed something inside of you? Was your life possibly changed, altered in a way that you had never really thought that it could be? The story of the Canaanite woman is our story.

It's a reminder that life is very messy. It doesn't always unfold like we wish it would. We don't always get the attention that we desire when we cry out for mercy.

But the gospel and our story tells us that we continue to raise our voices. We encourage others to join our voices alongside of us because then our voices can no longer be ignored and great our faith will be. So my prayer for us this week is to find where mercy is needed in this world.

When we leave here, I pray that we make a commitment to look around at the corners of our streets and those under our bridges and we pray and we say how is mercy being extended to them? How can we be a part of that voice? How are we calling out into the fringes of society saying we were once welcomed into this holy story too, so let's welcome all.

Let's continue to do that work today for we must remember that all of us, no matter what, are the voice of the Canaanite woman.

Amen.