

# "Silent Instruction"

Text: Matthew 15:21-28

May the love of God fill you with wonder, may the sacrifice of God the Son fill you with gratitude, and may the indwelling of God the Holy Spirit fill you with faith, comfort, and confidence. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians:

"*The silent treatment.*" I would be surprised if there is even one child here today, let alone an adult, who isn't familiar with exactly what that is. Kids may not be able to put a name to it, but virtually all have used it at one time or another – on siblings, friends, parents – whenever and wherever the need arises. It's actually quite a display of arrogance when you stop to think about it. Somehow we come to imagine that the very worst that we can do to someone who has earned our profound displeasure is to deprive them from hearing our voices. I suppose the psychology behind it is the notion that employing the silent treatment will effectively convey just how upset we are, and just how contemptuous we are feeling toward them. The unspoken message is, "*At this particular moment you are not worth even the breath or effort it would take to speak to you. I will deprive you of all communication until such time as you correct the terrible wrong that you have brought upon me, or until I can magnanimously bring myself to forgive you for it.*" Clearly the silent treatment is most often not a particularly mature way of handling adversity.

Yet every once in awhile it serves a purpose, doesn't it – even a noble, laudable purpose. At times, for example, it can be the only way to keep from saying something you will later regret, or to prevent an ugly, impulsive argument. Occasionally the silent treatment is the only way to make a point or to teach a vital lesson.

Does God ever give his children the silent treatment? Did Jesus, while he walked this earth? At times it seems so, but did he really? We find such a case in our text for this morning, where we find the Savior himself seemingly employing the silent treatment. Since our Lord, in living a perfect life, also left us with the perfect example, it is both wise and profitable to examine every single thing he did and to understand why he did it. That is our goal this morning as we examine the Word of God found in Matthew's Gospel, the 15<sup>th</sup> Chapter:

**ESV Matthew 15:21-28** *And Jesus went away from there and withdrew to the district of Tyre and Sidon. <sup>22</sup> And behold, a Canaanite woman from that region came out and was crying, "Have mercy on me, O*

*Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon."* <sup>23</sup> *But he did not answer her a word. And his disciples came and begged him, saying, "Send her away, for she is crying out after us."* <sup>24</sup> *He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."* <sup>25</sup> *But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me."* <sup>26</sup> *And he answered, "It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs."* <sup>27</sup> *She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table."* <sup>28</sup> *Then Jesus answered her, "O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire." And her daughter was healed instantly.*

This is the Word of God. Surely God's Word is worthy of our careful study and meditation. Clearly there is great benefit for each of us to listen and to learn whenever God himself speaks to us. Desiring the blessings our God offers us, so we pray, "**Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth!**" Amen.

In Jeremiah 20 we read the following, seemingly innocuous statement: "**Pashhur the son of Immer, the priest who was also chief governor in the house of the LORD...**" This seemingly bland and unimportant statement went largely unnoticed for centuries, until a coin was unearthed during the excavation of one of the oldest parts of Jerusalem, a coin that bore the name "Immer." Christians jumped all over the news as yet another "proof" that the Bible is the inspired Word of God. Such "proof" really accomplishes nothing of any lasting spiritual value. The reason, of course, is that the Christian *faith* cannot be proved. The coin actually only proves that a statement made in the Bible was historically accurate. It proves nothing about the Christian *faith*.

Do you ever question this? Does it ever bother you that God, for all practical purposes, seems to be giving the silent treatment to mankind when it comes to proving the Christian faith? Yet ask yourself: *How many foundational elements of the Christian faith can you list that can actually be verified by outside evidence?* The answer is none. Not one. We cannot *prove* that God created the earth in six natural and consecutive days about 6000 years ago. We cannot *prove* that this same God then destroyed all but 8 human beings in the Genesis flood, or that Christ was born of the Virgin Mary, lived a sinless life, or that he rose from the dead on the third day following his crucifixion. We can't *prove* that God has declared the debt for all sin to have been paid by his Son, or that eternity will be God's gift to all (and only those) who believe in Jesus Christ. We can't even *prove* that there is a heaven or

a hell. And yet we'd like to. We yearn to. We'd love nothing better than to find the ark, or to turn up decisive evidence *proving* divine creation and a young earth. Better yet, who hasn't longed for the skies to open and for the Creator God himself to declare from the heavens: "*Only the Christian religion is true!*" Why do we crave something like that? To convince the world around us and thereby to win them for Christ? That's probably what most of us would say, but would that be the truth? Probably not the whole truth. We would certainly love to see all unbelievers converted, but we are all also familiar with the parable of the rich man and poor Lazarus. The point of Jesus' words at the end of that parable is unmistakable: *Visible proof does not convert unbelievers.* Jesus there said that if the rich man's brothers would not believe *through hearing the words of the Bible*, they would not believe even if one were to rise from the dead.

Why then do we yearn so for some sort of physical proof? Isn't it either pride (we want the world to know we're right) or because of our own lack of faith and conviction, our own lingering doubts? We want some extra bit of physical proof to dispel our persistent questions and apprehensions. From a human perspective this is understandable. The stakes here could not be higher. We have only one chance to get this right. No one gets a "do-over." No one ever gets to die, have a conference with God to get the straight scoop, and then to come back from the dead to live life a second time. Every human being has one chance and one chance only to face our God on Judgment Day and to be judged by him according to the criteria he has established.

That's why we crave some sort of proof. We want clear and irrefutable evidence that Christianity is true, not just to convince the world, but to bolster our own convictions. And yet trying to shore up our faith with material proofs is as fruitful as trying to catch the devil with a butterfly net. That which is spiritual can only be created and strengthened by the spiritual. Only the Word of God can accomplish such things. God hasn't given us the silent treatment as to what is and is not true. He's told us everything we need to know in his Word. The Bible is God's *promise*, God's proof. It is a product of sinful weakness that we want – even demand – more.

How many elements of Christianity did we say earlier could be proved? None. Our only verification comes in acknowledging the Bible to be the authoritative source that God says it is. That requires faith, and faith is not a matter of external verification and proof. It is trusting in that which we can in no way verify, in no way see or prove. You all know the defining passage from Hebrews 11:1, "***Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.***" That is also why some have

referred to faith - blind trust in God's Word - as the highest form of worship we human beings could offer to our God. It is also why Jesus reserved his earthly praise for those who demonstrated true saving faith.

All of these truths are borne out in a very practical way in our text for this morning. Here Jesus praised the faith of a human being. We should therefore be intensely interested. First the setting. A woman - a descendant of the heathen Canaanites - came to Jesus in our text crying out for help. Her daughter, demon-possessed, was suffering terribly. As a result the mother too was suffering terribly. What mother, after all, does not suffer twice over whatever afflicts her child? She cried out for relief from the Savior, both for herself and for her child. Notice that she falls at the feet of the Savior and cries not "*Help my daughter*" but "***Help me!***"

But now what about the *apparent* silent treatment that Jesus gives her? Do you suppose that Jesus is toying with this woman, tormenting her while all the while intending to grant her request? Hardly. Jesus never pretended to be what he was not. Some believe the harsh words of the Savior were tests for the woman to pass before her requests would be granted. They see perseverance in prayer as the greatest lesson in this text. There is more.

The woman cries after Jesus. Her belief that Jesus is more than just a healer is shown by her words, "***Lord, Son of David.***" This was a term for the Messiah, yet Jesus does not answer. She keeps up her fervent appeal for help, to the point where the disciples felt compelled to beg Jesus to "***send her away.***" We would be too hard on the disciples if we imagined that what they were asking was for Jesus to send her away *empty-handed* and to just be rid of her. Their intention was undoubtedly for Jesus *to grant her request* and *then* to be rid of her. Or at least to shut her up. They had, after all, seen enough of Jesus' power by this time to know that he could grant her request with a word. That they wanted him to grant the woman's request is shown by Jesus' answer to them, "***I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.***" If the disciples had not indicated that they wanted Jesus to give her what she asked before sending her away, this statement would have made no sense.

Note that Jesus wasn't silent here. He was here making a very important point to his disciples, and therefore also to us. The point was this: Not just any old faith-system would do. There are not many paths to heaven; there is but one. Salvation can be found only in Jesus

Christ, and God's whole purpose for raising up and preserving the Jewish nation was to thereby bring his Son into the world to do what needed to be done to earn our salvation.

The woman, in utter humility, falls at Jesus' feet and begs, "**Lord, help me!**" Jesus answers, but our text does not tell us that he is yet speaking directly to the woman but to his disciples. He still appears to be giving her the silent treatment. Picture in your minds the drama as it here unfolds. The text seems to indicate that Jesus looks only at his disciples and speaks only to them until the very end. So also *to the disciples* (literally translated) he says: "**It is not a good thing to take the children's bread and toss it to their little pet dogs.**" The woman hears Jesus' words, and here is where the depth and character of her faith is revealed to us. It serves as an example for us not simply because of her persistence (for the godless can also be impressively persistent) and not simply because she displayed humility (for the godless will gladly debase themselves to get what they want). What sets this woman apart is her complete confidence in Jesus' power or ability, along with her complete acceptance of all that Jesus says as true and right. She did not debate with Jesus. She did not whine or demand her "rights" or complain of unfairness. She did not demand some tangible proof before she would acknowledge that Jesus even had the power to help her. Instead, accepting Jesus' power as a given, she also readily accepted his words as altogether good, true, and right. Here is true faith in all its lowly beauty. *Yes, "salvation is of the Jews." Yes, I am but a "little pet dog" compared to the chosen people of Israel. Yes, it is wrong to give me that which was intended for your own children. Your words and mission to the Jews I understand and accept, but are not the pet dogs allowed the crumbs which fall from the feast prepared for the masters? Though I am not a Jew, would you grant me still a tiny morsel of your divine power and compassion?* That, she believed, would be more than enough. Clearly it was.

Jesus was neither giving the silent treatment nor playacting here. He was teaching – teaching the woman, teaching his disciples, teaching us. This is the kind of faith he wants for us – a faith that simply, humbly and confidently trusts everything and only what he has told us in the Bible. There he is never silent. There he communicates with us with both clarity and perfection. Our Savior's desire for each of us is therefore a faith that does not question or rationalize about the facts he has revealed to us, but humbly clings to them and there takes its comfort and security. God desires a faith that sees the Bible as his handshake, his Word, and trusts him to keep his Word though all the world prove false and unreliable. He would see in us a faith devoid of any sense of entitlement, trusting that crumbs from God are more than enough.

Can you recall any other occasion when Jesus appeared to give someone the silent treatment? You know the account well: ***But when he was accused by the chief priests and elders, he gave no answer.*** <sup>13</sup> ***Then Pilate said to him, "Do you not hear how many things they testify against you?"*** <sup>14</sup> ***But he gave him no answer, not even to a single charge, so that the governor was greatly amazed.*** (Matthew 27:12-14). Why did Jesus there give no answer? Because there was nothing to be said. Their accusations were, at the same time, both true and false. Though he himself was innocent of the accusations they brought against him, he was nonetheless guilty of all, for God the Father placed our sin and guilt on his perfect, holy Son. He was ***"laying upon him the iniquity of us all."*** The Father was declaring the only one who had no sin of his own to be guilty of all sin.

Jesus' silence before Pilate and the Jewish rulers thereby gave *powerful testimony* to the single greatest truth of the Christian faith: the debt for our sins, which we could never pay, was accepted, and then paid in full, by God's own Son. Jesus was punished; we are forgiven. God grant to each of us a faith that simply takes God at his Word – the kind of faith that we see in the Canaanite woman in our text. A faith that humbly accepts the Word of God as true and right in the absence of any additional proof. A faith that simply trusts, *without doubt*, that though utterly unworthy and undeserving, Jesus' life and death have in fact removed our sin and guilt forever. *Grant us such a faith, Lord, and we truly need nothing more.* Amen.

ESV **Isaiah 56:1, 6-8** Thus says the LORD: "Keep justice, and do righteousness, for soon my salvation will come, and my deliverance be revealed. <sup>6</sup> "And the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD, to minister to him, to love the name of the LORD, and to be his servants, everyone who keeps the Sabbath and does not profane it, and holds fast my covenant-- <sup>7</sup> these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples." <sup>8</sup> The Lord GOD, who gathers the outcasts of Israel, declares, "I will gather yet others to him besides those already gathered."

ESV **Romans 11:13-15, 29-32** Now I am speaking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry <sup>14</sup> in order somehow to make my fellow Jews jealous, and thus save some of them. <sup>15</sup> For if their rejection means the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance mean but life from the dead? <sup>29</sup> For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. <sup>30</sup> For just as you were at one time disobedient to God but now have received mercy because of their disobedience, <sup>31</sup> so they too have now been disobedient in order that by the mercy shown to you they also may now receive mercy. <sup>32</sup> For God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all.

ESV **Matthew 15:21-28** And Jesus went away from there and withdrew to the district of Tyre and Sidon. <sup>22</sup> And behold, a Canaanite woman from that region came out and was crying, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon." <sup>23</sup> But he did not answer her a word. And his disciples came and begged him, saying, "Send her away, for she is crying out after us." <sup>24</sup> He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." <sup>25</sup> But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me." <sup>26</sup> And he answered, "It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." <sup>27</sup> She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." <sup>28</sup> Then Jesus answered her, "O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire." And her daughter was healed instantly.



# ST PAUL LUTHERAN CHURCH

BISMARCK, NORTH DAKOTA

# ST. PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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Michael Roehl, Pastor

**The 12<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost – August 20, 2023**

## The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

## The Opening Hymn – 777 (Brown Hymnal)

"Amazing Grace"

## The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

## The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

**The Old Testament Lesson:** (Isaiah 56:1, 6-8) God in His Word never spoke in exclusive terms about the offer of salvation. He wanted "**all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.**" Yet neither did He speak in permissive terms. We ought to be of the same mind - wanting all men to be saved, but never willing to compromise the Word of God in our own misguided effort to accomplish that noble goal. Our life's work is to share the "whole counsel" of God's Word, by which souls are saved.

## Psalm 30 (Supplement page 34) (Brown Hymnal) (Read responsively)

**The New Testament Lesson:** (Romans 11:13-15, 29-32) Jesus made it clear that He loved his own race, the Jews, but came to suffer and die for all men, for "**God so loved the world...**" Paul here imitates his Lord. Some mistakenly believe that Paul is here teaching that all will eventually go to heaven. The offer of heaven is open to all, but only through faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. It is in that way that God "has mercy on all."

## The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed – page 15. (Brown Hymnal)

## The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 778 (Brown Hymnal)

"Grace Has a Thrilling Sound"

## The Sermon – Text: Matthew 15:21-28 (Printed on the back of this bulletin)

**"Silent Instruction"**

## The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

## The Post-Sermon Hymn – 784 (Brown Hymnal)

"Lord Take My Hand and Lead Me"

## The Prayers

## The Benediction

## The Closing Hymn – 783 (Brown Hymnal)

"Jesus, Shepherd of the Sheep"

## Silent Prayer

**Welcome!** - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with churches and missions throughout the United States and around the world. We are glad you are here. Thank you for letting us share the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, and come again.

## Attendance – Sunday (43) Average (43)

### This Week at St. Paul:

<b>Today</b>	<b>-10:00 a.m.</b>	– Worship Service
	<b>-11:00 a.m.</b>	– Fellowship Hour
<b>Next Sunday</b>	<b>-10:00 a.m.</b>	– Worship Service
	<b>-11:00 a.m.</b>	– Fellowship Hour
	<b>-3:00 p.m.</b>	– Opening Service at ILC

**CLC News** – Calvary of Marquette has called Pastor Aaron Ude. Prayers are requested for Pastor Em. David Baker and his wife Sandy. Their granddaughter, Rachel Maldonado, and her boyfriend were killed this week in a car accident. A GoFundMe account has been opened to help defray funeral expenses. Rachel was a member of Mt. Zion of Detroit.

**Mission Festival** – We will be exchanging Mission Festival speakers this year with our sister congregation in Valentine, NE. Next Sunday Pastor Roehl is scheduled to conduct the service in Valentine. Pastor Paul Nolting will be the guest speaker for our Mission Festival later this fall. Pastor Roehl will therefore be out of town next weekend from Friday through Monday afternoon.

**Church Council Notes** – Five members of the Council, plus the Pastor, met on 8/14. Treasurer Mantz reported that offerings year-to-date have been keeping pace with our budgeted needs – although we will be incurring some unexpected expenses for loader repair and replacement of the parsonage dish washer. Several maintenance and upkeep projects in and around the church are needed. Plans are progressing to host the West Central Pastoral Conference in September. A couple of beds are still needed. The Council discussed whether a landline was still needed for the church. It was decided that we will keep our current VOIP system for the time being. We have transitioned from Microsoft to Google software for file storage and church service projection.