

Teen Devotion

Year A – Proper 15

The Church God Wants



One truth shared: The church is meant for all people.

Leaving that place, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out, “Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is demon-possessed and suffering terribly.”

Jesus did not answer a word. So his disciples came to him and urged him, “Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us.”

He answered, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.”

The woman came and knelt before him. “Lord, help me!” she said.

He replied, “It is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to the dogs.”

“Yes it is, Lord,” she said. “Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master’s table.”

Then Jesus said to her, “Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted.” And her daughter was healed at that moment.

Matthew 15:21-28

Their Faith Might Surprise You!

When you think of heaven, what do you think of? Maybe you think of the people you’ll see there who you can’t wait to spend the rest of eternity with! But have you ever thought of the people you’ll see in heaven that might surprise you? Do you think you’ll be walking down paradise street and see someone you weren’t expecting? How many “surprises” will be with us in heaven?

When Jesus was on the cross, he was dying next to one of those “surprises”—a man who had a track record of crimes. He knew he deserved to die for his sins. But Jesus? Our Savior deserved no punishment at all. So the criminal asked Jesus for help. He asked Jesus to simply remember him after this was over. What did Jesus do? Laugh? No. Jesus promised he would be with him in heaven that very day. The man believed in Jesus. In the end, that’s all that mattered in his life.

Jesus wants us to view the people in our lives through the perspective of his love and forgiveness won on the cross. Do we always do that? When someone who doesn’t fit the profile of a “regular church-goer” walks through the doors on Sunday morning, what goes through our minds? Are we welcoming or hesitant? Do we wait to get to know the person, or do we judge them simply based on their appearances or past history?

The disciples assumed the worst about the Canaanite woman who came to Jesus for help in Matthew 15. They thought they were watching out for Jesus when they asked him to send her away because she wouldn’t leave him alone. Besides, the disciples grew up with prejudice towards any Canaanite who lived on the wrong side of their shared border. Their hearts were trained to look down on her.

Jesus needed to show them a better way, *his* way. He sees her hurt and he hears her cry for mercy. She just wants Jesus to heal her daughter. But Jesus also wants to use her to teach a lesson for us all. He tests her. He seems to push her away, but she won’t give up. She won’t leave without his help. She knows Jesus is all she needs now and forever. “Then Jesus said to her, ‘Woman, you have great faith!’” And he heals her daughter right then.

Faith. That is what Jesus looks for. He wants us to come to him knowing we’re anything but perfect. He wants us to come to him when we need help. He wants us to come to him when we need forgiveness. And he promises to give us all the help and forgiveness we need.

Jesus welcomes “surprise”—anyone who comes to him regardless of age, race, gender, talent, or popularity. He knows we all have the same problem. He gives the same solution to all—himself. So let’s ask ourselves, if this is how Jesus views and treats me, then shouldn’t I do the same with the people in my life? And shouldn’t I especially do the same when someone visits my church for the first time? Absolutely! And you can!

May Jesus give you all the love you need to view others with his same love.

Prayer: Lord, give me your perspective which sees others as your beautiful creation. Keep me from placing quick judgments on those you have put in my life to serve. Give me and my church the opportunity to tell them that you sent your Son for them too. Amen.

Foundation Teen Facilitators Guide

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Starting the Discussion: *This first section is intended to be light and easy, to engage and get the conversation going. Have a little fun with these questions.*

- Agree or disagree: We will be surprised to see certain people when we get to heaven.
- Why is it important for a teenager to be thinking about who is going to heaven and who is going to hell?

Connecting: *This section serves as a bridge between the opening conversation and the body of the study/discussion. It should get the group thinking about the topic/text even before they’ve looked at it.*

- Discuss a Bible account/story where Jesus welcomed someone no one else would.
- Name a couple of obstacles you’ve experienced that get in the way of “welcoming” someone no one else will.

Digging In: *Here we want to dig into some texts or the text for the day and see what Scripture says. The questions are meant to be open ended to give a beginning of a scriptural conversation. These are a guide for a spiritual and scriptural conversation.*

- Describe what you think was going through Jesus’ mind as the woman approached while the disciples tried to send her away.
- Read Revelation 7:9-10. When John saw a vision of people in heaven, what did he see? How does he describe them? What does that teach you about heaven? What does that teach us about who needs to hear about Jesus today?

- Read Mark 10:13-16. Why do you think the disciples were rebuking the people bringing little children to Jesus? How do these verses relate to Matthew 15:21-28?
- 1 John 2:2 shows us who exactly Jesus died for. Why is this a good passage to remember when we might hesitate to invite or welcome someone to our church?

Conclusion: *Here we want to wrap up the discussion, perhaps circling back to the “connecting question” above.*

On a scale of 1 to 5 (with 1 being not very welcoming and 5 being very welcoming), rate the “welcome” atmosphere of your church when it comes to first-time visitors. Identify one area that your church might improve. Then discuss how you personally can be part of it.