

Lent 2 (2026)

Frank Graeff is not a name most will recognize, but his story deserves to be heard.

He was a Methodist minister in Pennsylvania in the early years of the 20th-century.

He was well-liked, and his outwardly cheery disposition earned him the title -- the ‘sunshine minister’.

But that cheerful demeanor was often a mask, as he was plagued by periods of severe depression.

It was during one of these dark nights of the soul that he wrote a hymn that has brought comfort to thousands around the world. The title of this hymn is “**Does Jesus Care?**”

It's not found in the Episcopal book (perhaps it should be), but some of you may know it, especially if you come from a Methodist or Baptist background.

More than that, it was sung and recorded by Billy Graham's great song man, George Beverly Shea . . . and thereby gained an even larger audience.

Each stanza contains a question, beginning with:

**Does Jesus care when my heart is pained
Too deeply for mirth or song,
As the burdens press,
And the cares distress,
And the way grows weary and long?**

The refrain gives the answer:

**O yes, He cares, I know He cares,
His heart is touched with my grief . . .**

I wonder if the Canaanite woman told about in this morning's Gospel found herself asking the same question -- Does Jesus care? After all, as the story opens, we find Jesus answering her 'not a word'.

She certainly was in a state of deep distress. Her daughter whom she loved was troubled with a severe emotional malady. "A devil" had his hold on her. No one had been able to break the power of that devil. Jesus was her last hope.

Perhaps when her cries for help seemed to be getting nowhere, the thought that passed through her head was that as a Gentile, a woman and part of a people who bore the name of one of Israel's ancient enemies, she was outside the scope of the great Healer's concern and care.

Over the years, there have been many speculations as to why Jesus delayed healing her daughter and spoke to her as He did. None is completely satisfying. In the end, I think we have to say we don't know for sure.

The best answer seems to be that Jesus was testing and tempering her faith . . . bringing that faith from the level of tenuous to fully developed and robust.

His verbal interplay with her could also be interpreted as a teaching moment for the Twelve.

The descendants of Abraham, you see, were recipients of special blessings and privileges, but they were also called to be God's light-bearers to the nations.

Many, if not most of the Jews of Jesus' day, including the disciples it seemed, did not understand this calling. They thought in terms of

the Jews only. It was not uncommon to speak of Gentiles as ‘dogs’.

This broadening out of God’s saving plan to include the Gentiles . . . to all who believe regardless of their nationality . . . would only become plain following Jesus’ death, resurrection and ascension. The story is written up in the Acts of the Apostles.

The coming of this Canaanite woman might be seen as an advance sign of what was to happen in the future. Jesus seized this moment to prepare the disciples for this coming event.

That is a second hypothesis, though sure they don’t have to be separated. It’s likely Jesus dealt with the Canaanite woman as he did both to test and temper her faith AND to instruct and prepare the disciples.

Let me add: The outward movement of the Gospel which she anticipates was in no way a

denial of all that had gone before. Rather it was a fulfillment.

For example, in Isaiah 60:3 the prophet says: **“And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising.”**

And in today’s Old Testament reading, we hear Solomon say in the prayer he offered at the dedication of the Temple:

“They [the foreigner] shall hear of thy great name, and thy mighty hand, and of thy outstretched arm.”

And this what we find this Canaanite woman doing, only she comes not to the Temple in Jerusalem but to Jesus. How might we interpret this change in venue?

Well, like this: Jesus is the new, better Temple. Under the old order, the Temple was the place where earth and heaven overlapped,

and thus the place you went to do business with God . . . to have your sins dealt with . . . to bring your needs and cares.

This old order, however, was giving way to a new. Within a generation after Jesus's death and resurrection, the armies of Rome would lay the Temple in Jerusalem even to the ground.

Does that Temple need to be rebuilt?

No! Something – actually Someone – better is come. Jesus is the Temple made without hands. He is the place earth and heaven overlap. He is where you and I must go for help in time of need.

The Canaanite woman told about in today's Gospel comes as it were prematurely, but her place in the kingdom was not going to be denied.

The disciples, you will remember, wanted to send her away. To them she was a noisome nuisance, but not to Jesus.

As the story ends, we find Him not sending her away but giving her one of the highest commendations He gave to anyone: **“O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto you, even as thou wilt.”**

Is there anyone you want to cast away? Anyone you think unworthy of your or God’s care and attention? If so, think again. Learn from Jesus.

As it turned out, she was quite a remarkable woman. She recognizes Him as the Messiah when most of the Jewish religious leaders in Jerusalem did not. We know this to be so because she gives Him a messianic title. She calls Him “Son of Daivid”.

More than that, she saw Him possessing the power of living God. She believed He could do what only God could do: heal her daughter.

And Jesus did not shut the door in her face. She came early to the Kingdom party but was admitted just the same.

There are a number of lessons we can learn from this account in which she plays a leading role. Allow me to highlight several.

The first is: God is no respecter of persons. No matter who you are, no matter your race, place or status in society, no matter how littered your background is with mistakes, failures and sins, Jesus cares and stands ready to help.

But the blessings associated with the advent of Jesus do not just drop into our lap. No, like the Canaanite woman, we must seek them out and cry out for them. Faith unlocks the casket of God's blessings.

The Canaanite woman exemplifies Jesus' words in Matthew 7:7: **“Seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you.”**

By knocking and seeking, she discovered firsthand what the hymn writer would discover many years later in the depth of His depression: **“O yes, He cares. He cares for me.”**

What are your needs and concerns this morning . . . for yourself and those you love? Bring them to Jesus. If the door into God's storeroom of blessings does not open immediately, keep knocking.

In Genesis, we have the story of Jacob (one of the progenitures of the nation of Israel) wrestling with God in the form of an angel. Some commentators have suggested that this mysterious person with whom he wrestled was none other than a manifestation of the pre-

incarnate Son of God, the Second Person of the Trinity, Jesus.

In this ancient story, Jacob just would not turn loose until he received a blessing.

There is parallel between this story and the one involving the Canaanite woman.

Like Jacob, she would not turn loose until she received the blessing she sought, the healing of her daughter.

So, may it be with you and me. The Bible, this passage in particular, teaches persistence in prayer.

Jacob's persistence led him to become a 'ruler with God'. The Canaanite woman is his female, New Testament counterpart. She likewise persisted and prevailed. Learn from her.

In the course of life, we may well encounter tests and struggles, but these tests and struggles are not designed to break us but to make us . . . not to defeat and destroy but to increase our faith and make us strong. ///

A final application, and with this one I close:
If Jesus cares, we ought to care as well.

As the Father sent the Son into the world to bring hope and healing, so the Son sends us out.

Being busy is no excuse. Not wanting to get involved is not an option. ‘Someone else can do it better’ is a thought that needs to be put away.

Yes, Jesus cares, but we have a part to play as well. We have a Gospel to proclaim and hands meant for service. Let us be about the Master’s business beginning this very moment.