

What do you do when God seems distant? What do you do when God seems to be your enemy, to be opposed to you in every way? How do you react? What do you say? That's what the Canaanite woman in our Gospel lesson for today was asking, because that was exactly the situation that she faced. Every time she turned towards Jesus, he seemed to turn away and to be distant and hidden from her, so she had to figure out what she was going to do. So when God hides from you, how do you respond?

I think to understand this text a little bit better, we have to first understand something about who this woman was and why Jesus was probably acting in this way. Because this woman was a Canaanite. She was not a member of Israel. She was part of a different group of people altogether. In fact, a group of people who had historically been Israel's enemies. The Canaanites had worshiped false gods, and because they worshiped false gods, they led Israel into idolatry. So if there's anyone who we wouldn't expect to be a believer in God, it would be this woman. Even the Samaritans, who we encounter from time to time, were foreigners too, but they at least had some of the Bible. They at least knew who God was. All this woman has to go on is the things that she has heard about Jesus.

But with that little amount of information, she goes to him, and she asks him to heal her daughter, because she knows that he can do this. And so she says, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David! My daughter is severely oppressed by a demon." But Jesus doesn't say anything. Jesus turns away from her and doesn't seem to want to have anything to do with her at all. So what's she going to do? How is she going to respond? Well, she goes after him. She pursues him. She goes after him so fervently, in fact, that the disciples get annoyed. They say, "Tell her to go away! She's annoying. She won't be quiet. We don't want to hear her anymore." But Jesus still doesn't answer her. And so she goes after him again, and she comes out to him and finally gets up in his face and says to him, "Lord, help me!" But Jesus rebukes her. He says to her, "It's not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs. It's not right to take the promises given to Israel and throw them to Israel's enemies." And she says, "Yes. You're right. Yet even the dogs eat the crumbs under their master's table." And now Jesus shows what he's been doing all along. He says to her, "Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you believe." Jesus had hidden himself from her. Jesus had withdrawn from her so that she would run after him. He wanted her to pursue him. He wanted her to come after him. He wanted her to hold him to his word, and that's exactly what she did.

But I ask you, Christians. How often do we struggle with that same problem? When God seems so distant from us, when God seems like he's hidden from us? And no matter what we do, no matter what we say, it seems like we can't get his attention. Maybe we're struggling with some kind of sickness. And we know the promises of God. We know that he has promised us peace. We know that he has promised us even healing. And yet God is distant. He leaves us alone. He doesn't answer our prayer. How do we respond? What do we do with that? Do we just say, "Well, I guess he doesn't want to hear me. I guess that he doesn't care about me. I'll just leave him alone"? Or should we pursue him and run after him and hold him to his word? Or maybe we're dealing with the death of a loved one, someone whom we lost, and we're wondering where is God with his comfort? This comfort that he has promised to us? All I seem to feel is grief. Where is God in the midst of my grief? Maybe he doesn't care about me. Maybe he just doesn't want anything to do with me. Or does he want us to pursue him, to hold him to his word? And it doesn't matter whatever the promises might be of God. When we wonder and struggle and pray, and not hear anything from him, what do we do in the midst of that situation? How do we respond? Do we say, "I guess God just doesn't care. I guess God doesn't want to listen to me today"? Or does he want us to pursue him?

Because Christians, God does not lie. When God promises something to you, he will do it. He will keep his word. Even when it seems impossible, even when it seems like it's so far off, God will not fail to

keep his promises. And even when he himself seems to go back on those promises, when it seems like he doesn't want to do them, he wants us to hold him to that word, because he wants us to hold onto him in faith. Think of it this way. Abraham, for example, and how he struggled, because God promised him that he would have a son and that he would be the father of many nations, but Abraham was ninety years old. Abraham was as good as dead. By human terms, it seemed like there was no way that God could keep that promise to him. But did Abraham waver? Did he wonder and doubt? No. He held on to God, held onto him for dear life, and God gave him a son in his old age, Isaac, the son of the promise, because God does not lie. And then when God commanded Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac, to kill the promised son, to basically wipe out the whole promised nations that would come from him, did Abraham doubt and waver? No. He held onto God, knowing that God can even raise the dead, and he would've sacrificed his son with that trust, because he knew that God does not lie.

So Christians, God has promised you comfort, and he will give it. God has promised you joy in the midst of grief, and he will give it. God has promised you life in the midst of death, and he will give it. He does not lie. He does not go back on his promises. And if he is withholding himself from you, it's not because he's going back on his word, but because he wants you to hold him to his word, no matter what. God hides himself so that he might be found again. So run after him, Christians. Hold him to his promises. Hold him to his word, because he will not fail to do what he has promised to do for you. God hides himself so that he might be found. And God withdraws himself so that we would hold on to him in faith all the more.

To him be the glory, now and forever. Amen.