

Trinity 11 2026

I stand here in need of God's mercy and grace, may I speak in the name of God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

I find Jesus' behaviour in today's gospel reading difficult to understand. First, he ignores the Canaanite woman, and when his disciples want to send her away, he seems to support that by saying:

I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

I wonder why Jesus acted in this way? This is not the only time someone who is not Jewish asks for his help, and in other instances when this happens Jesus offers healing without hesitation. A few chapters earlier in the gospel of Matthew Jesus heals the servant of a Roman centurion. The centurion could reasonably be described as an enemy of Israel, as part of the military power occupying and oppressing them. He definitely was also not of the right ethnicity according to the boundaries Jesus claims for his ministry in this moment. And there are more examples of Jesus' ministry crossing ethnic boundaries. So why does he suddenly make it an issue here? A question difficult to answer given that none of us can see into Jesus' mind at that particular moment.

Yet the woman does not give up easily and boldly argues with Jesus, not accepting his response.

Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table.

And Jesus relents, he revises his initial refusal and heals her daughter:

Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.' And her daughter was healed instantly.

Jesus goes from telling her that due to her ethnicity she and her daughter are not worthy of his efforts, to praising her and healing her daughter instantly. And while it is unclear why Jesus put up a barrier for this woman that he did not put up for other people of a different ethnicity, this woman teaches us something important: We can question Jesus, we can boldly challenge Jesus and argue when we disagree. And if we can do that with Jesus, that means we can do that with God.

Sometimes our image of God is of a God who is immovable and so detached from us that there is no point in arguing back. There is also the whole thing about God being God and us being only human, so how dare we challenge God? Within churches priests, pastors and other leaders have and continue to at times project an image of God, where God can never be questioned, never be challenged, never be argued with. Church leaders have and still use that image of God at times to silence any challenges, disagreements or arguments people have with them, by projecting themselves as those who ensure God's will is being done. In cases of abuse in church, once one looks a bit closer at what image of God was being taught within that church, one can often find an image of God that is controlling and will not allow for any challenges, disagreements or arguments.

Yet the story of the Canaanite woman reminds us, that it is ok to disagree with God, to challenge God and argue back. She is not the only person mentioned in the bible who challenged God, and in other cases too, God did by no means reject the challenge.

Abraham received news that God would destroy Sodom and Gomorrah, because of the many people who were acting unjustly within those cities. But Abraham wanted to save them and argues with God to save those cities, if there are only 50 righteous people in there. And God agrees to that, but Abraham continues to argue, until the number is down to only ten righteous people.

There is also the story of Job, who having lost everything, does not accept his friends' opinions that his loss must be due to some awful sin he committed. Job insists that he has acted justly and righteously and that nothing can justify his loss. Long speeches are being made back and forth between Job and his friends and in one of those speeches Job demands to drag God to court and accuse God there for his unjust suffering. In the end God speaks and confirms that Job is right, his suffering was not due to any sin Job committed. But God then also goes on to remind Job, that God is God and Job is not. God doesn't scold Job for any of the very bold challenges Job has hurled at God, but also reminds him that God is much bigger, the source of all life and in no way at Job's command. God is utterly free, in no way under Job's control, but God also welcomes the fiery exchange with Job and restores to Job all that he has lost.

So the Canaanite woman is not alone in her boldness to challenge God. And there are multiple instances in the bible where people challenge, disagree and argue with God and God does welcome it and responds to it positively.

God has created us with brains capable of critical thinking, of course God wants us to use this ability. That does not mean we are always right, if we challenge God, God might actually relent, just as Jesus did in praising the Canaanite woman and healing her daughter. But there is no guarantee, because in the end we are not God, as Job was reminded. Yet God welcomes our disagreement, our arguing and our challenge. God is willing to be challenged by us. So if there is something in your heart or on your mind that you wish to challenge God about, God welcomes your challenge just as much as the ones from Abraham, Job and the Canaanite woman. We are welcome to challenge God, to wrestle with God and when we courageously do so, we might be surprised in various ways by God's response. So let us be bold and courageous like the Canaanite woman!

Amen.