

True Acceptance

Matthew 15:21-28

More young people than ever before are in college. Not too long ago you went to college if you were in the upper grade levels of your high school class and you had a specific profession like medicine, engineering, or law to pursue. But today it seems necessary to get a college degree to get a job in finance or business or with any kind of company, at least a job with decent benefits and the salary to make a living like your parents have. That is one big reason why Iowa State has grown so much from 26,000 ten years ago to the over 36,000 it is today. You might be experiencing some of the effects of that as each fall the university tries to squeeze more and more students into limited residences. More upper classmen are encouraged to move into apartments than in the past.

All of this increased size in college enrollment is part of a most notable demographic trend in the last two decades concerning the delayed entry of young people into adulthood. According to a large-scale national study conducted since the late 1970s, it has taken longer for each successive generation to finish school, establish financial independence, marry and have children. Today's 25-year-olds, compared with their parents' generation at the same age, are twice as likely to still be students, only half as likely to be married and 50 percent more likely to be receiving financial assistance from their parents.

People see all the young people going to college and reflect on it being a part of what is called "delayed adolescence," or "emerging adulthood." Traditionally we think of people having 8 stages in life: infancy: birth to 18 months, early childhood: 18 months to 3 years, play age: 3 to 5 years, school age: 6 to 12 years, adolescence: 12 to 18 years, young adulthood: 18 to 35 years, middle adulthood: 35 to 55 or 65 years, and late adulthood: 55 or 65 to death. They add to this "emerging adulthood" from 18 to whatever in the 20's.

The result of this is this kind of attitude about "emerging adults:"

It used to be, too, that adolescents couldn't wait to grow up, to take on the mantle of adult life. Now, it seems they are in no hurry to move out of childhood - ever. When you hear that "boys" of 30 are still playing video games just like any 15-year-old, you wonder what 40 is going to look like for them.

Young men are particular singled out for this because as men they don't have the limits age gives to women about being mothers. Men can be much older than woman and be still be "marketable" for marriage and raising a family.

The woman that approached Jesus would have been a part of a lot of criticizing in her day. Matthew tells us she was "Canaanite." Mark tells us she was "Syro-Phoenician." Either way she was bad news for a Jew. In the Old Testament the Canaanites worship pagan idols and sacrificed little children and young women to those gods. God had told the people of Israel to wipe out that pagan worship, but time and again the people of Israel got caught up in it. And it was a Phoenician princess, Jezebel, who caused so much trouble in Israel when she married Ahab king of Israel and introduced a particularly evil form of the worship of the god Baal to Israel. God allowed Israel to be punished for this by allowing many countries to invade their land and conquer them. Finally the people of Israel, who were later known as Jews, learned to avoid all paganism. This included having nothing to do with pagans like this woman.

We know the story from here. Jesus accepts this woman by healing her daughter. Even more than the physical health of her daughter, Jesus says, "Woman, your faith is great." She went away with a living relationship with God through Christ Jesus.

Young people today can feel with the church like than woman. Many in the church view this generation as lazy, entitled, spoiled, and focused on yourselves. And they see so many young people leave the church. Many of you come from churches in which most of the people have graying heads. So

now that you are in college, you don't have to face that situation anymore. You can hang around other people who don't judge you as being different or lazy or spoiled.

But what about Jesus? We hear that Jesus was accepting, that He didn't judge others, that He just loved. However that is not the Jesus we read about in Scripture. He doesn't give us the luxury of being with Him and not being with his Church. No, you don't have to go to a fancy building on Sundays to be with the Church. But you have to be with other followers of Jesus. There needs to be time in our lives when we are where Jesus says He will be—in His Word, in our Baptisms, in the Lord's Supper, and with His people. That probably doesn't happen when we are playing video games or studying for homework or watching videos or going out with friends.

Jesus accepted that Canaanite woman. But why did she come to Him? When she first gives her request to Jesus, he says, "I have come only for the lost sheep of Israel." Then He says, "It is wrong to take the children's bread and throw it to their dogs." Jesus is not rejecting this woman. He is testing her faith. He is confirming two things about her—that she is a "dog" in terms of her worthiness to God and that He will still accept her as a loving God who gives us the faith to trust Him. This woman comes to Jesus because she realizes there is nowhere else to turn. As a person possessed by a demon, her daughter is in desperate shape. Only God can free her daughter of that demon. That helplessness is what makes her look to God for help and that God turns her to see Him in Christ Jesus.

If we see Jesus as a nice guy who didn't get caught up in all the prejudices of His time and wants us to accept everyone, then we aren't seeing Him like that woman. The God who promises to punish sinners is not a "nice guy." Jesus spoke about hell more than anyone else in the Bible. He used the word "woe" many times. We need to realize like that woman that we are in desperate shape and we can do nothing about it. Then Jesus is not just someone who is "nice." Then He is our only hope. We then want to go to Him like that woman and beg, not because He wants to see us grope, but only then do we set aside those things that get in the way. Then we can be truly embraced by our Savior, Christ Jesus.

So much of the "acceptance" emphasized in our culture is really about "me." If everyone is supposed to accept each other, then I don't have to worry about my faults. I can just ignore them. We can act like we are accepting, but it is only on the outside.

But Jesus accepts not by ignoring our faults, but by forgiving them. We don't have to pretend our problems don't exist. We can come to Jesus openly, not for him to ignore what is wrong with us, but to nail it to the cross where He died for us.

Then it doesn't matter whether we are Jew or Canaanite, senior citizen, middle adult or "emerging adult." When we come to Jesus like that woman did, then Jesus means everything to us. Then we want to be where Jesus is—with his people. That doesn't mean you have to be here in this church or doing it on a Sunday. But it means that you meet with other people because they are Christians and you do it regularly, not just once in a while. That is real acceptance!

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