The FIRST READING
Are they included or excluded?
Chapters 56-66 of this book were probably written as the Jerusalem temple and city were being rebuilt. As the Jewish people recovered from the devastation of the Babylonian Exile decades earlier, some Jews wondered about the status of the non-Jews (foreigners) who lived among them. In some cases these non-Jews were married to Jews.

Opening the gates
Parts of the Jewish scriptures exclude non-Jews from the community or warn Jews to keep away from non-Jews. Such passages reflect the concern that non-Jewish beliefs and customs would weaken or distort Judaism. In this passage foreigners are welcome as long as they love and honor God. The doors of the Jerusalem temple are open to them.

This passage is an example of a shift in Judaism toward the belief that one day God would bring all people to salvation, Jew and non-Jew alike.

The foreigners...
I will bring to my holy mountain and make joyful in my house of prayer...

ISAIAH 56:1,6-7
Reading closely
1. Why are the hearers told to do what is right and just?
2. In what ways might people join themselves to the LORD?
3. How will God further change the lives of those who join themselves to him?
4. How might non-Jews have felt about these words?
5. How might these words have changed the way non-Jews acted?
6. How might the Jewish people have felt about these words?
7. How might these words have changed the ways Jews saw themselves?

Living the word
8. Who do you expect to be included in God’s kingdom?
9. Who do you think will be excluded?
10. Do you think your boundary lines are the same as God’s?

ISAIAH 56:1,6-7
PSALM 67:2-3,5-6,8
ROMANS 11:13-15,29-32
MATTHEW 15:21-28
**MATTHEW 15:21-28**

**Reading closely**

1. What do you think life was like for the woman?
2. How close do you think the woman first comes to Jesus and his disciples?
3. What does the woman believe about Jesus?
4. How do you think the woman reacts when Jesus initially ignores her?
5. How do the disciples react to the woman?
6. Do you think Jesus speaks to the disciples or the woman in v.24?
7. What all do you think the woman is feeling as she comes closer to Jesus?
8. How do you think Jesus treats the woman?
9. Why does Jesus heal the woman's daughter?
10. How do you think the woman reacts when Jesus implies her daughter is healed?
11. What might Jesus have been thinking and feeling during all of this?
12. What might the disciples have thought?
13. In what ways did life change for the daughter?
14. What might the woman have told her daughter about Jesus?

**Living the word**

15. What does this story leave you thinking about?

---

**THE GOSPEL READING**

**Israel’s privilege**

Jesus spent most of his ministry in Galilee among rural Jews. Tyre and Sidon are Gentile cities to the northwest of Galilee. It’s not clear if Jesus crossed into the region of these cities or went near them but kept within the borders of Galilee.

As a Canaanite the woman represents not only Gentiles but also the inhabitants of the region into which God led his people after freeing them from slavery in Egypt. Canaanite beliefs had been a constant threat to the Israelites’ worship of God.

The lost sheep of Israel could refer to all of Israel or only to certain people in it. Either way, Jesus’ ministry is for these children of God, not for dogs. In surprisingly harsh language Jesus makes it clear that Israel holds a privileged position in God’s eyes.

---

**Keeping a foot in the door**

Despite being initially ignored (v.23) the woman persists. She addresses Jesus using titles that express her faith in him and in his status as a descendant of David, one of Israel’s greatest kings. She thus affirms Israel’s privileged status.

The woman then runs up and bows or kneels before Jesus just like his disciples did in the boat (14:33). Her faith is at least as strong as theirs; it’s certainly stronger than the response of the Jews who have so far rejected his ministry.

After showing great faith, love for her daughter, and humble acknowledgment of Israel’s unique status, the woman reveals her intelligence. She cleverly uses Jesus’ own metaphor to make a case for being included in his ministry. She knows what’s good and life-giving when she sees it.

**The door opens**

Although Jesus concentrated his ministry among fellow Jews, stories such as this show his willingness to attend to the needs of everyone. After his resurrection the risen Jesus commands his followers to make disciples of all nations (28:19).

---

**PRAYER**

God of holiness and life, you chose Abraham to be the father of a people you would form into a holy nation, a special possession.

You called Moses and the prophets to teach your people how to live. You chose David and his descendants to govern your people wisely.

Through Jesus, born of your chosen people, you shared your blessings with us. Jesus invites us to be part of your kingdom.

Give us faith to accept his invitation. Give us humility to call upon him for guidance. Give us perseverance to overcome whatever stands in our way.

We ask this in the name of Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.