Take care of our own first. Ever heard that one before? Take care of our own first. This seems to be a very popular view among our people. We recently came through a political period where one of the dominant political campaign slogans was expressed in this way: America first. And huge crowds just cheered and felt I guess that it was about time. You might also here it in a phrase like “family first”. My home congregation was named, “First Lutheran”. It’s a big deal isn’t it? To be first. First in line. First place. Who comes first is very important to us it seems.

Where does this way of thinking come from? My experience with this is that it often shows up when we try to take care of others and it seems to start geting in the way of our own needs. Why should we be fighting overseas when we can’t control our own streets? Why should we be giving money to that group, when we struggle with our own finances? It’s some form of perceiving that we are attending to others problems, and in doing so neglecting our own.

The other way that it comes into play I think is that it’s a response to being overwhelmed. There are just so many problems out there and so many issues to address that it’s a way to make sense of things. And we do see people who seem to want to take care of everyone else and neglect themselves or their own. Dad takes care of the business operation, but doesn’t have as much time for Mom or the kids. There are so many ways to sort of misplace priorities, and take care of your own first is an attempt to get your priorities right. There is a sense in which if you don’t take care of yourself first, it won’t be long until you can’t take of anyone else either. And so in ones own mind, take care of your own first, is just down to earth practical homespun common sense. In the medical world they have this concept known as triage. You have multiple patients and triage is a way to figure out which patient needs to come first. So It’s not always a selfish thing. Life brings us many situations where we have to set priorities for our day and what will come first today. Maybe it won’t be you today.

So like most things in life, take care of your own first is a big complicated. Because on the one hand it can be a form of arrogance and forget you. We’re all racing to the lunchroom to get in line. And everyone wants to be first. So it’s everyone for themselves, I don’t care about you. Take care of your own first can be very ugly, callous, and mean spirited. But on the other hand, sometimes its just necesssary. If you go to Burger King they give you a number and if it’s a big crowd other people will come first before you. Others will have priority. It’s a way of avoiding total chaos. If you call American Airlines they will answer the calls in the order they were received. Wait for a couple of hours and eventually someone will pick up the phone. But it’s a way to establishing some kind of order. Here it’s a good thing.

So the issue here is not the phrase, it’s the kind of person that you are when you say it. Take care of your own first. We were here first. Could be a way to say forget you, or it could be a way of making sense of things. Could be a brick wall to sort of wall people out. Or a way of helping everyone get in. Women and children first, that’s not being selfish. And so each of us needs to honestly look into our own hearts this morning, to see where we’re coming from when we say, “take care of your own first”. What kind of person does that turn you into?

So welcome to our Gospel lesson today, because here this issue plays itself out in a very interesting way. A little background here. The region of Tyre at this time was a border area between the Jews and the Gentiles. So in our day it might be a place along the border with Mexico somewhere in Texas or Arizona. Perfect analogy. So Jesus is in this border area when this woman comes up to him and begs him to heal her daughter who has some kind of demon, or mental illness. The result is a big surprise. I think it’s the only time in the Gospels where anyone asks for healing, and Jesus says no. Nope, not for you. Now that should get our attention. And even more so when we discover why he refuses. Well, the reason is because in Jesus mind, he is there to take care of his own first. He even says it. He says, “Let the children be fed first, and by that he means of course his own people, the chosen people of Israel. Isreal first. Sorry, that’s how it is. You are not a priority. You’re the wrong race. The wrong country. The wrong religion. Here in this country, we take care of our own first.

Now we, as Christians might hold these kinds of views ourselves. Many do. If you’re not one of the chosen, too bad for you. But it gets even more difficult because of what he says next. It is not fair Jesus says, to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs. Perhaps we might be less offended if Jesus had said something like, “You know, I’m just too busy today”. Call me tomorrow and I’ll see if I can fit you in at some point. But that’s not it. Matt Skinner, Professor of New Testament at Luther seminary simply says that Jesus is palpably rude. He also says that Jesus sees her as presumptuous, asking for what is not rightfully hers. Yikes. Now some people say that Jesus is giving this woman a test, to see how strong her faith is. Really. Jesus tests her faith by calling her a derogatory name? That makes a bad situation worse it seems to me.

So Jesus today in our lesson seems to reveal the ugly side of “Take care of your own first”. Hmm. If you’re like me, you saying “this can’t be right”. Because this is not the way that we normally think about Jesus is it? Jesus for us is unconditional love, forgiveness. It doesn’t matter who you are or where you’ve been or what race or status, if you come you will never be rejected. Grace, Grace and more Grace. God is love, or something like that. Let’s share God love.

So, it's hard to see Jesus implicated here today, in our kind of ugliness. This ugly side of “take care of your own first”. Our kind of hostility about race, and about what happens on the borders. You know what the attitude is about immigrants and how ugly it all gets. Take care of our own first. It’s hard to see Jesus implicated in this kind of favoritism. Remember our 2nd lesson today. First verse. How can you with your acts of favoritism really believe in our Lord Jesus Christ? Oh Oh. And remember the famous passage in 1 Corinthians 13 on love. Paul writes that one thing love is not is enviable or rude. So why is Jesus so rude here? One of the things that was drilled into my head about Jesus was that he was perfect. Without sin. If rude comments aren’t sin, what is? We have enough rudeness in our world today right? We don’t need anymore right? Especially from Jesus. So this is a tough one to swallow. But there it is, and you can’t weasel out of it. There Jesus revealing a “Take care of your own first” that is favoritism and rudeness. Our hero is humbled. What are we to do?

Well, lets do the what text does. Let’s take a moment to consider this woman. From the wrong side of the border. The wrong race, the wrong sex, the wrong religion. And let’s take a look at how she handles the reality of take care of your own first. What does she say? “Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs. It’s amazing, because she’s the other side of this issue. Does she complain about Jesus favoritism or his nasty comments? Not at all. She acknowledges her lower place. She doesn’t have to be first. Or equal. Not in the least. She is willing to grant Isreal priority. She doesn’t come to Jesus demanding her rights or her fair share of the pie. Not at all. Isreal does come first. Not a problem.

She simply asks for a few crumbs. Just a little bit of recognition. Just the small recognition that she isn’t just a Gentile, or Hispanic. Or black. Or Chinese. Or a communist or a socialist. Or an illegal alien. Just the smallest recognition that she is a human being. I am real person. I don’t need to be number one, or try to make everything perfectly equal. All I need is just the smallest recognition that I am human being. And at that moment, she gets the healing she came for. This woman changes Jesus with her humility and Grace. And suddenly Jesus saw that a whole new group of people were his own.

In confirmation last Wednesday we were going through the story of creation, and when we got to part about God creating Adam and Eve, one of young people raised her hand and said these exact words. “Do this means we’re all related”. And what she meant of course was that we’re all family, it doesn’t matter what country or religion we are. That’s exactly what this woman of the wrong race and religion was trying to teach Jesus. And what’s amazing about Jesus is that he was humble enough to learn it. Maybe Mark had to put it this way in order to get through to Jesus stubborn followers about take care of your own first. And maybe that’s more important today than some doctrine about perfection. This is father who can learn from his child. Or a boss who can learn from an employee. A God who can learn from you. A liberal who can learn from a conservative or the other way around. A God who doesn’t have to always be right. It’s one of the most healing things I can think of.

Take care of our own first. It sort of comes down who see as our own doesn’t it? That’s something to think about. Amen.