

TIME FOR GOD'S GRACE AND MERCY

Hear the Word of God for this *Reminiscere* Sunday, as this "little Easter" brings to our remembrance faith's response to Jesus, our merciful Lord and Master:

Yet coming, she worshipped Him continually saying, "O Lord, You must continue to help me."¹

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ

Those who were hear last Sunday heard of the Temptation of our Lord. Among those tests, Jesus was tempted to fall down and worship the devil that Jesus might be given all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. Jesus responded with the Word of God in context,

The Lord, the God of you, you must worship, and to Him alone you will give religious service.²

This week, you have heard that the woman of Canaan, *coming, she worshipped Him continually saying, "O Lord, You must continue to help me."³* What do we learn when Jesus, Who has declared that one must only worship and give religious service to God alone, permits the woman to worship Him?

The right-worship – orthodox – conclusions that can be made from that comparison is that Jesus is God. This, as you have heard, and will hear again, is the Faith that moved the formerly pagan woman to fall down and continue to worship Jesus. For many sermons, the Faith of the woman is that which is commended. And that is a right conclusion, for eye-witness records declare that Jesus declared to her:

"O woman great of you (is) the Faith."⁴

From that, the preaching could rightly go on to speak of her faith, and persistence in the face of Jesus. He, as you have heard, appeared to have repeatedly refused to hear her requests. Only after a bit of dialogue, does Jesus seemingly agree to grant the woman's desire – the healing of her evil demon-possessed daughter.

¹ *Matthew 15:25.*

² *Matthew 4:10.*

³ *Matthew 15:25.*

⁴ *Matthew 15:28a.*

Yet, the danger in following that line of thinking about this day's text is that we may be tempted to focus overly much on the woman's persistence. If we are not careful in rightly dividing the text, we will end up with overemphasizing the so-called, "third-use" of the Law. That, as you may recall, is where guides for Christian living come into the Church's teaching.

But, Law is Law, whether it will be curb, mirror or guide, and always works to convict, condemn and kill. For, if we over-emphasize the worship work of the woman, and her repeated petitions of Jesus, we may very well end up with teaching that goes like this:

"Since we can learn from the woman of Canaan, what can we do that imitates her in the Face of God who seems unwilling to hear our petitions? Well, we can learn from her persistence. So, when God seems silent to our petitions, we, as she, can keep on asking Him. If we are sharp in our responses to God's ignoring us, or even speaking His Word against us, we will eventually get Him to respond...."

Or, for you Muslim -, or Roman-, or General Protestant- Lutherans, the axiom drawn from the text could be: "Try harder, and God, Who is merciful, may just hear and reward your efforts." After all, Jesus gave the woman that which she desired because of her persistence, right? Arrgh....!

Consider that one of the right emphases of the ancient Sunday readings in Lent is centered on the Faith of Jesus. That will lead us to the more appropriate direction for our evangelical – "of the Gospel" Lutheran thoughts concerning today's texts. When we reflect in that manner on this Sunday's readings, we end up with our focus on Jesus, and all that He did and does. In His Word and work, certainty and hope are found, even in lands, and among peoples, of unbelief. So, with Jesus as the actual focus of the readings in this Sunday of Lent, let us begin anew to hear about the right-worship of God-in-our-flesh. Our Good News reading for today began with words like these:

And going out, Jesus departed into the parts of Tyre and Sidon.⁵

⁵ Matthew 15:21.

We do not have an accurate biblical location given from whence Jesus went out. What we do know is that, in today's record of events, substantiated by Saints Matthew and Mark, Jesus traveling through areas that were predominantly non-Jewish. At that time in history, those who lived in those parts had Greek and Phoenician ancestry. For about 3,000 years to that day, they had been called Canaanites. (Peoples in that region would self-designate themselves as Canaanites until the 5th century AD).

The text indicates that Jesus, Who knew that His appointment in Jerusalem to defeat sin, death and crush the head of the Satan was coming ever nearer, was traveling in pagan lands in order to avoid the ever-encroaching Jewish crowds. They, as you may remember, were after Jesus because of His earned reputation of a miracle-worker. St. Mark's parallel witness informs the faithful that Jesus desired to be hidden for a while. Yet, we learn that Jesus failed at retreating from those who wanted Him to effect healing, for our text continues:

And behold, (a) woman, (a) Canaanite from the boundaries of those (regions), coming out, she cried out continually saying, You must mercy me, O Lord, Son of David: my daughter is evil demon possessed.⁶

Jesus is in a "retreat" place. He has drawn apart from those who were Jews and their expectations of the Messiah who was coming to rescue them from the evils of this world. From the texts, it appears that the Canaanite woman had no human right to approach Jesus.

First, the text word-order gives the emphasis to the fact that the person approaching Jesus is a woman. In that age, it would not have been considered socially right, nor religiously permitted for a woman unrelated to Jesus to approach Him by herself. Second, St. Matthew calls her a Canaanite, St. Mark, a Syro-Phoenician. That leads us to understand that she was not Jewish. Therefore, she would have no religious reason to approach any Rabbi, or Teacher of the Jews.

⁶ Matthew 15:22.

In spite of all of that, somehow the Word about Jesus, through which God creates and sustains faith, had come to her. She approaches Jesus, with the Word of God coming repeatedly from her mouth, saying with emphasis: *You must mercy me, O Lord....* It seems that she knew pages 152 and 153 of *Lutheran Service Book....*

Really, today, the Word in those pages moved you to echo the formerly pagan woman's words four times. My, the Word of God in your presence moves you to be persistent in asking God for mercy – at least at every Divine Service you attend. So, perhaps you can understand the Canaanite woman's persistence. She was in the Presence of Jesus, just as you are. Faith's response to our faithful God is to continue to ask for mercy.

In addition to the woman's repeated pleas for mercy, she calls Jesus, *Son of David*. You have heard, for many years, and learned, and come to believe, that title is to be used for the Christ, the anointed One of God. It had flowed into the Church from David's confession of his greater Son. (That was covered in a Psalm sermon and study, here last Church Year). So, a woman that we have no reason to believe is Jewish, appeals to Jesus with a Messianic title, calling upon Him to have mercy.

Does this mean that she had appropriated the Faith at that time?

No, she may merely have heard, in the reports of Jesus' miracle-working, that formula was used by those to whom Jesus granted healing. It might have seemed to be the magic words to use to move Him to compassion. Or, she might actually have heard what the title Son of David meant and actually believed that He was the Lord Who came for all people. In any event, the fact that she approached Jesus as a supplicant, one who was asking for mercy, trusted in His faithfulness! She, at least, believed He was the One who could deliver her daughter from the grip of the evil that possessed her.

So, what was the central problem about which she trusted in Jesus to be faithful? Yes, she said, *my daughter is evil demon possessed*.

Wow, today, you, after your first, and second appeals to God for mercy, you petitioned God for relief from the evil that possess this fallen world. That is some of that

which lies behind your petitions for *peace from above...our salvation...peace of the whole world...the well-being of the Church of God...* (Had someone handed that woman a prayer – book based fully on God’s faithfulness in Scripture like ours)?

Think about it, her request is really a parallel to that which we ask God as He moves us to bring candidates for Holy Baptism to the water and His Word. Congregations like ours which avail themselves of the early baptismal rites reformed by Dr. Martin Luther are reminded of the evil of demon possession during the exorcisms which precede the imposition of God’s gifts in the Sacrament. Again, you are free to be reminded of that each Divine Service. That is to say, when God in His faithfulness moves you to return to your baptism in Confession and Holy Absolution, you are following in the path of repentance the Canaanite woman was repeatedly displaying.

Those who repeatedly ask God to be faithful to His promises to deliver us from evil (another tie to something you regularly say), are clinging to His faithfulness. The woman of Cana’s request of the Word incarnate shows her faith that Jesus had, at least, access to God’s holiness. Before that, all evil must flee or be consumed. Our text record of Jesus’ faithfulness continues:

But He answered her not (a) word. Then coming alongside the disciples of Him they asked Him saying, “You must release her because she cries out after us.”⁷

Jesus appears to have ignored her petitions. Yet those Jesus had, and would, send out to cast out evil, His disciples had become weary of the woman’s repeated petitioning. Remember, Jesus had already taught them to repeatedly petition God with words we may translate, *deliver us from the Evil One*.

So, they wittingly or not, become the woman’s confessors. To those who follow Jesus as His true disciples, God has given the calling and duty to petition Him on behalf of all kinds of people. (Think of our weekly requests by name in the Lord’s services here). It is also our right and duty to intercede on behalf of unbelievers in the world. They say, *You must release her because she cries out after us*. There is some indication in that request

⁷ Matthew 15:23.

that they may have actually meant, “give her what she wants and send her away... because she is bothering us.” The men who had retreated with Jesus for some relief from the pressing of the crowds on account of Jesus’ miracle-working heard the woman, and interceded to Jesus, on account of His faithfulness.

While we can speculate on the attitudes of the woman’s confessors, Jesus knows their thoughts. He uses their petition to teach all who will hear of this event later:

But He answering, said, “I was not sent except for the lost sheep of House of Israel.”⁸

Jesus first Word, as it is recorded in the Greek text is, “Not!” He had heard all the petitions, but, rather than showing His faithfulness in His mission to restore God’s fallen creatures at that moment, He goes on to declare His faithfulness to the Word of God in His mission to save. There is a teaching moment in Jesus’ response. Who, you should ask, as should those disciples, are the lost sheep of the House of Israel. (Here we could go into ties in our Psalm and Old Testament readings. But, God-willing they will be proclaimed again two and three years from now). What is the woman’s response to Jesus’ statement of His faithfulness to His mission of salvation first to the Jews?

Yet coming, she worshipped Him continually saying, “O Lord, You must continue to help me.”⁹

The Canaanite woman response is to answer Jesus’ faithfulness with the response of the Faith. She shows that she actually has come to believe that Jesus has power over evil. (Does she know of His coming victory on the cross, and all that is shown in the first two Stations of the Cross now adorning our walls? Not likely).

Even so, she gives the good confession of the Faith, without her confessors’ help. Yet, Jesus responds:

But He answering, He said, “It remains no good to take the loaf of the children and to cast (it) to the canines.”¹⁰

Again Jesus begins His response to the woman’s request in the worship of the Faith with the word “Not!” Jesus’ rebuke is sharp. Jesus proclaims it as not good to take what

⁸ Matthew 15:24.

⁹ Matthew 15:25.

¹⁰ Matthew 15:26.

God intended for His family and give it to those who were not of those who were supposed to be of the household of the Faith. (Perhaps you will remember that Jesus had warned his disciples not to give the holy things to the dogs.)

Yet, Jesus Who knows the hearts of all, sees that this woman has the gift of the Faith. He sees that she will respond correctly to His rebukes. Yet Jesus speaks as He does so that His other hearers could grasp that the Faith trusts in God's faithfulness. So Faith responds:

Yet she said, "Yes, O Lord, for also the canines continue to eat from the little crumbs (that are) continually falling from the table of their lords."¹¹

Wow, she is sharp in the Faith! She who Jesus has called a dog, infers that He is her master. She asks for bits from His table... Where are we going with this?

Yes, to the Table of our Master! There He gives us bits of bread and wine, to which His Word has been given. In, with, and under them, He comes to us, and gives us of His faithfulness – forgiveness and strengthening to life everlasting. Jesus commends us in the Faith even as He continues, through the proclamation of His Word, the faithfulness of the woman of Cana:

Then, answering Jesus said to her, "O woman great of you (is) the faith. It must become to you as you continue to wish."

And she was healed the daughter of her from the hour, that one.¹²

That shows that it is God's will to be hold to His Faith to save all people. We are out of time... for this sermon, for this year, but not for God's mercy!

The peace which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus

Lent II, *Reminiscere* (LSB One-year series)
Psalm 121: Genesis 32:22-32; I Thessalonians 4:1-7; Matthew 15:21-28
March 1, 2015

Pastor Michael H. Morehouse

Soli Deo Gloria

¹¹ *Matthew 15:27.*

¹² *Matthew 15:28.*