**Great Faith?**

**Matthew 15:21-28**

Reminiscere – 2.28.2021

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

And behold, a Canaanite woman from that region came out and was crying, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon." But he did not answer her a word.

She was not deterred however and kept crying out to Jesus. She was following Jesus and His disciples and continuing to make her plea. We know this from the exchange between Jesus and his disciples for they came and begged him, saying, “Send her away, for she is crying out after us.”

How do we know they did not want Jesus to just send her packing without answering her plea for mercy? Listen to Jesus’ response, for in it, He denies their request to do something for her by saying, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." In other words, she is not of Jewish descent, I will not help her.

Is that truly what Jesus was saying? Or, was Jesus teaching? Jews considered Canaanites as goyim, second class citizens. They were not descendants of Abraham, and even if they might have been proselytes – those who had learned the Jewish faith and become believers, they were still considered second-class believers. Jews looked down their noses at such in a sort of disgust and with a belittling attitude.

Jesus’ response is not simply to bring out her faith, for He knew it! His response is also a call those Jews who had such an attitude toward those who were not “long-time members of the congregation from their birth” to see what great faith is. He was in the process of teaching His disciples as well that what He had was also for others than Jews – for as we will see, they too can have great faith.

Getting back to our text, it is plainly obvious that she heard this response, but unlike most of us who would have just walked away, figuring that Jesus had given His final answer to her request, she did something different. She came before Jesus and fell to her knees, “Lord, help me.”

Do you hear this woman? “O Lord, Son of David,” she had called Him earlier. Prostrating herself before Him, kneeling before Him, she begs, calling Him, “Lord.”

What does this mean? Paul helps us understand in his letter to the Romans (Rom. 10:8-9) *But what does it say? “The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart”—that is, the word of faith which we are preaching, that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.*

To call Jesus Lord, is to show she understand that He is Messiah. It is to call Him God. She was a better Jew than the Jews! This woman believed that this man Jesus was the One foretold, the Son of David, who was come into the world. She saw Him as the prophecies fulfilled. She believed He was merciful. She believed as we will confess later, that Jesus is the “light to lighten the Gentiles.”

Jesus replies to her kneeling before Him, “It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs.”

I know, this sounds rather harsh, but think about it. How many of you have ever had a dog in the house at mealtimes? Yeah, I think you are beginning to understand. While you may not throw the children’s bread to the dogs – INTENTIONALLY – they still eat under the table. Furthermore, while the dogs did not get the children’s bread, they were fed.

Jesus is in a way saying that He will grant her petition. And, already knowing her faith, she will be the example of great faith He desires her to be. “Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table.”

Dear friends, what is your faith?

Let’s face it, this past year has been nothing but a test of faith. COVID-19 has done nothing but try faith.

What do you believe about God in this pandemic? Do you believe He still comes into our presence with His gifts?

What do you believe about God and this congregation? Do you believe this is ***HIS*** church? Do you believe that He will use it for His purpose? I know a congregation in Denver, Colorado which closed its doors this past Sunday. I was there for my brother-in-law’s wedding. I had visited while at the seminary for a week and played on their church softball team. Pauline’s mother had been a teacher at their school. It had been a congregation of nearly 1000 souls when I graduated from the Seminary, they needed to call a vicar to assist the pastor for many years. Was it God’s will that it close?

It has served God’s purposes, and even in closing, God’s greater will is still to be done.

I am not hinting at anything at all about this congregation. I am asking if we trust God no matter what our eyes may ***think*** that we do see? If anything about this congregation, what I am asking you to consider is this.

Are we like the Jews, thinking this is “OUR” church, that outsiders have no place in it, that they are only dogs? Or do we see this as the place where God feeds and nourishes the faith of all who enter?

Is this the place which welcomes all with open arms? Do we think of this congregation, worrying about our church, what are we going to do to keep the doors ***of our church*** open?

Or do we see this congregation as the place where people can come in repentance, seeking God’s help in their need, bowing before Him and begging, “Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master’s table.”? And that in this place, Jesus replies, “Great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire.”?

Does God know our needs? Does God know our fears? And let’s face it, they are not confined just to COVID or this congregation.

Did you pay attention to the gradual we responsively prayed by reading it? The troubles of my heart have enlarged: Oh, bring me out of my distresses! Look on my affliction and my pain: and forgive all my sins. Oh, give thanks to the LORD; for He is good! For His mercy endures forever. Who can utter the mighty acts of the LORD? Or can declare all His praise? Blessed are those that keep justice, and he who does righteousness at all times! Remember me, O LORD, with the favor You have toward Your people; Oh, visit me with Your salvation.

You want a summary of the gradual? “Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master’s table. Let me have the crumbs!” That is great faith~

What do you trust? Do you see the gifts of God as mighty and powerful, even those gifts that seem like only crumbs? By faith understand that water, word, bread, and wine, although seemingly insignificant things, are the mighty vehicles by which God works great miracles?

I have often wondered, what would happen if we were to send a note to all those whose names are in the church directory, stating that on such a particular given Sunday – even in the midst of this pandemic – everybody who attends the entire service at Zion or St. Peter or St. John would receive a $50 bill when they leave.

I am sure that the pews would be packed – social distancing might be a problem.

Now, imagine that there were baptisms at all three churches that day, that the sermon ran a half hour, and then we had communion. Yep, you can already hear the complaints that would be registered. Legion would be the complaint complaining about how long the service ran – “that idiot pastor scheduled baptisms, was extra long-winded, and kept it a communion. He did it on purpose! He just loves to make us miserable.”

On receiving the $50 bill as the passed out the doors, how many would make it past Badger Tap or some other eatery? And those who did, how long would the $50 last? Maybe a special trip to WalMart would be quickly arranged, or something. For most, that money would be gone by supper time. Honestly, $50 as a windfall isn’t a huge amount. It lasts how long?

Listening to those who complained, what was it that brought about their ire? The crumbs!

A simple sprinkling of water does not look like all that much, but some grumbled. God’s Word, in and with that water, forgave sins, bestowed faith, and granted eternal salvation, as it made another child a member of the kingdom of God.

Yes, as the pastor droned on for thirty minutes, many were checking their watches and rolling their eyes. But, the Word of God soothed the consciences of a number of people, granting them peace in heart and mind, as the Holy Spirit strengthened their faith as He was present in that Word.

With a packed house, of course communion ran longer than normal, and people had to sit waiting, tapping their feet. Tummies were growling for that little wafer and sip of wine did not satisfy anybody’s hunger. But, Christ’s body and blood, hidden in the forms of bread and wine, were present. In the eating and drinking, forgiveness was granted to the penitent along with the gifts of eternal life and salvation and faith was strengthened.

“Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master’s table.”

Christ is present here today. He is not just floating around, filling everything as He does every day. Christ is here today in the flesh. He is present here in a very real, and physical way, just as He promised. He is present in what seems to be nothing more than simple crumbs – water, word, bread, and wine. These are the means that God uses to do incredibly miraculous things.

“Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master’s table.”

Great faith? I suppose it might be nice to have another fifty bucks! Personally though, I’ll take the crumbs, they’re worth far more and they will last for eternity. Amen.