

Faithful Reminiscence

Today is the second Sunday in Lent. For those familiar with the historic one-year lectionary (which we follow), today is also known as “*Reminiscere Sunday*.” You can hear the word “reminisce” quite clearly. There’s a reason for that. One glance and you can see that our Scripture lessons for today all focus on the **certainty** of God’s holy Word. These lessons all focus on holding fast to God and reminiscing; that is, ***faithfully remembering*** all that He has already spoken about Himself, His grace, His mercy, and His love for us.

Consider how our Lord wrestled with Jacob. If you remember, there was a lot of bad blood between Jacob and his twin brother, Esau; bad blood that started already in the womb. It became bitter and deadly after Jacob stole the birthright from Esau, which is why he fled from home. Esau made it public knowledge that he was going to murder Jacob once dear old dad had died. Years later, God calls Jacob to return home. Understandably, Jacob is quite worried about this endeavor. ***He trusts God (in his mind, at least), but he doesn’t trust Esau.*** Jacob tries to send gifts to Esau ahead of his return, hoping to “grease the skids” and butter Esau up. He even goes on to pray to God (this is good, even if it is used as a last resort), expressing his ***great fear and trepidation*** about crossing the river and entering into hostile territory (even though it was the Promised Land, and God had told him to return). Not ***content*** with God’s Word and Promise, though, Jacob takes matters into his own hands and sends his family and household across in two waves, all under the cover of darkness. Esau probably won’t fight at night, and if he does, he’ll only be able to get one group and not the other. This is when the Lord God comes down in the form of an anonymous man and begins wrestling with Jacob. They wrestled all night long and into the morning.

Now, if you remember, after “besting” the “anonymous man” in the wrestling match (because Jacob doesn’t know that he’s wrestling with God), he asks the man for his name. However, the “anonymous foe” (who we know is God) ***never*** reveals His name to Jacob. Instead, He answers the question with a question. “*What is your name?*” Jacob tells Him, and God immediately responds by telling him that his name is no longer Jacob, but Israel. Why? “*Because you have striven/struggled/wrestled with God and man and have prevailed.*” This is when the lightbulb clicks “on.” This is when Jacob learns that he’s been wrestling with God.

Okay...so the moral of the story is to fight and wrestle with God until you squeeze a blessing out of Him? **NO! That’s not what this is teaching us.** I know that’s what we want to hear, but that’s not the point of the story. Remember: Jacob was struggling and wrestling with ***doubt***. He believed God and His

blessings/promises, and yet his prayers and actions revealed the fact that **he really didn't trust God**. He was afraid. He doubted. So God takes on human form and wrestles with Jacob (and lets him win) all so that God can teach Jacob a profound lesson on trust. The lesson God was teaching: God **NEVER** forgets His promises! How's that for **reminiscere?! God NEVER** forgets His blessings. God had already promised that He would bless Jacob, and Esau wasn't going to be able to undo that.

The same goes for the Canaanite woman, although in this case it wasn't that your Lord was teaching her to hold fast, but rather His apostles. **She didn't need teaching. They did.** They viewed her as an outsider; as an "enemy" of God. And your Lord's initial treatment of her didn't exactly serve to change their minds. However, it was through her faithful, persistent confession of who He truly was that our Lord Christ taught those proud men what it truly meant to hold fast to God and His Gospel promises. **What about you? Would you willingly endure persistent suffering if you knew that God was using it as an opportunity to teach and strengthen those around you?** You may talk a good game, but do the fruits you bear confirm or contradict your "great confession"?

And take careful note here: Your Lord never says "no" to this woman as she pleads for help. I say this only because we understand that God does sometimes say "no" to our prayers. **This is true. This is love.** But...this isn't the case here. He **never** says "no." He just doesn't answer **immediately**. In fact, He says nothing to her at all throughout the entire uncomfortable affair; **not until the very end**. His reference to her as a lowly dog is spoken to His disciples, who urge Jesus to simply give her what she wants so she'll shut up and go away. This is when she interrupts and says, *"Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table."* She doesn't argue. She doesn't take great offense and call for a boycott of all things "Jesus" or try to "cancel" Jesus. Nope. *"Yes, Lord, I am an undeserving dog. You did come for the children of Israel. But you are the Son of David. You are the Messiah. You are the Lord God in the flesh. I believe this. I know what this means. Have mercy on me."* This woman demonstrated a truly great faith in her God and Lord. She persevered/endured and held fast to Him and His promise—**made Him remember His promise**—to be merciful to all who call upon and hold fast to the Lord God.

What about you? That's why these lessons are appointed for our study this second Sunday in Lent. **What are you struggling with? What are you wrestling with?** We all have crosses to bear. We all have struggles and sorrows and pains and worries. *"Thy will be done."* We pray it... **but do we actually mean it/believe it?** Be honest: we don't **always** hold fast to God and His promise that His will is being done and He is always working all things for the good of those who love Him. This becomes especially true when we're not seeing things play out the way

we think they should or when they're not happening as quickly as we want them to.

Every one of us here calls God "Lord" and prays that His will be done, and yet every one of us here has also struggled and wrestled with God, wondering if He might just be acting as our enemy once in a while. Did you ever stop to think that maybe God is strengthening you *through* your suffering? "*Suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts.*" St. Paul says that all of this is reason for Christians to **rejoice** in their suffering! God is working on you and building you up in your faith. ***Do you, though? Do you rejoice in your sufferings?*** We all want to lead God-pleasing lives, right? Did you ever stop to think that maybe your life needs to significantly change in order to be pleasing to God? Maybe God is trying to change you. Maybe God is trying to change someone else through you. How often we ask God to change the situation we're in, but so often we fail to recognize the fact that God put us in that situation to change us (or someone else who needs changing). ***But...that kind of Godly change might cause us to suffer, right? We can't have that!***

Look to this cross. Here is why we rejoice, in good times as well as in bad times, richer or poorer, in sickness and in health. "*Since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*" Look to this cross. Here is the One who truly became God's enemy...for you. ***God remembers His loving Gospel promise to save the fallen children of Adam, and here is the proof, lifted up and exalted for all the world to see.*** God's Gospel promise took on your flesh and took your place. Jesus was forsaken by God for you. Our heavenly Father poured out all His righteous wrath upon this One, ***all so that He wouldn't have to pour it out on you.*** This One drank down every last drop of that fiery Divine wrath—dregs and all—all so that you would ***never*** have to taste even a single drop of it. God has fulfilled His gracious promise to be merciful to you. He has fulfilled it in the work and person of Jesus Christ, who Himself has victoriously declared from His cross, "*It is finished!*"

And God makes this promise of redemption real and tangible for you even today, in your midst. Look to this font. Your Lord has kept His promise to you. Here is where/how He has made you His own, giving you a ***new name***—His almighty triune name—placing it upon your forehead and your heart, bringing to you His cruciform victory and peace. ***Hold fast to this promise...daily. You are baptized! You belong to God!*** I don't care how bad things may seem. You belong to God, and nothing and no one can ever take that away from you. Look to this altar/rail. Here is your Lord, in your midst, not to wrestle/fight with you, but to comfort you, keeping His promise to be with you always, even to the very end

of the age. Not even the gates of hell can prevail against this. “*As often as you do this, reminiscere/remember what I have said. This is My body. This is My blood, given and shed for you for the complete forgiveness of all your sin; for the peace that surpasses all understanding.*”

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ: Here is your joy and peace, even in the midst of suffering. Here is your reason to rejoice...always. ***May this cruciform peace change you.*** May you ever and always *reminiscere (remember)* and hold fast in the certainty of faith to this cruciform Truth and peace, and may you be blessed with the gift that is Christ’s peace for you, now and into all eternity.

AMEN