

In the Name of the Father and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ and may our Lord and Savior sanctify you in the truth, for His word is truth. Amen

First Sunday in Lent (2021)

*“Then Jesus answered her, **“O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire.”** And her daughter was healed instantly.” (Matthew 15:28, ESV)*

Great is Your Faith!

Rev. Toby Byrd

The Gospel Reading for today is the perfect picture of a great faith and an all-loving God. The account of the Canaanite woman and Jesus, besides showing us faith in action, also shows us the difference that exists between good and evil, between our loving Lord Jesus, whose sole purpose is our redemption from sin, death, and the devil, and the one who seeks our destruction, the devil.

In coming to save the lost, Jesus’ words often required Him to injure the feelings of pious Jews. Because of His fearless preaching, His disciples warned Him, saying, *“**Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this saying?**” (Matthew 15:12, ESV)* St. John tells us that the Jews were a little more than offended, in fact, *“**the Jews were seeking to kill him.**” (John 7:1, ESV)* Jesus, who had been preaching in Galilee, angered some of the Jews. More for the safety of His disciples than for Himself, He *“**withdrew to the district of Tyre and Sidon” (v. 21)*** an area northwest of the Sea of Galilee inhabited mainly by heathens, who although primarily unbelievers, were not entirely ignorant of the Jewish faith and its promise of a Messiah. The incident that occurred between Jesus and a Canaanite woman reveals this.

St. Matthew tells us, *“**a Canaanite woman from that region came”*** to Jesus (Matthew 15:22, ESV) crying out, *“**Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon.**” (Matthew 15:22, ESV)* Her daughter suffered from demon-possession, and out of compassion for her daughter, she comes seeking mercy. A Canaanite woman, an unlikely woman, a woman from a pagan, idol worshipping culture, comes to the Son of God seeking His mercy. She seeks Jesus over her country’s gods. This is truly miraculous. But we should not be surprised because God works in miraculous ways. With Him all things are possible, and He has chosen to grant this Canaanite woman a miracle, the gift of faith.

As we see, faith can appear in the most unsuspecting places. This woman, distraught over the condition of her daughter does not hesitate, to call on the Son of God to come to her aid. In using the title *“**Son of David**”* she confesses her faith in Jesus as the Messiah. This Gentile woman without knowing Jesus personally, without ever having seen Him, seeks Him out with the assurance He is the Messiah, He is the One who can answer her prayer. Somewhere, somehow, she had heard of Him, she had heard the Gospel, and having heard, the Holy Spirit opened her ears and her heart to receive the message with joy, granting her a strong, abiding, and beautiful faith. A faith that trusted and believed that because of the love and mercy which filled Jesus, He could and would save her daughter. God had elected this lone heathen woman to receive the gift of faith to believe in His only begotten Son, the Messiah. Thus, in her we can readily see that faith is purely passive, she did nothing herself to receive it, but rather God received her into His grace. She, an unclean person, born in an unclean country, taught to believe in false gods, now believed in the Christ, the Son of the Living God. But they, the Jews, who were given the oracles of truth from God Himself, rejected His Son!

Oh, look, some say, that's poppy cock, she probably heard that Jesus was some miracle healer, and this is why she came to Him. Maybe? But if this were true, why does she address Him as "**Lord?**" Why does she refer to His ancestry as the "**Son of David?**" Why not simply address Him as Jesus? Rather than beg, why not offer Him money? The simple truth is, when one is possessed by the Holy Spirit, they seek out the deep places of God. Being possessed by the Spirit, the Canaanite woman seeks the deepest place of God, His holy Son. The faith of this woman, a gentile pagan, hated by the Jews, puts to shame all the Jews who refused to believe.

Interestingly, we note that Jesus did not immediately respond to her request. He didn't even acknowledge her presence. But St. Matthew tells us this was not the case with the disciples, whom she annoyed. The disciples turned to Jesus and said, "**Send her away, for she is crying out after us.**" (*Matthew 15:23, ESV*) They had not yet learned the meaning of Jesus' words, when He said, "**'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.' For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.**" (*Matthew 9:13, ESV*) No, to them, this woman was a gentile, an unbeliever, an unclean person, one with whom they were not to associate. What is even more astonishing is that Jesus seems to agree, saying, "**I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.**" (*Matthew 15:24, ESV*) But her faith would not let go. Her faith clung not only to her hope, but to the assurance that Jesus would and could help her.

Kneeling before Jesus, the woman pleads her case. Please Jesus, do not send me away without my request having been granted. You can heal my daughter; you can vanquish the demon which possesses her. Please Lord, hear my prayer. Please, "**Lord, help me.**" (*Matthew 15:25, ESV*) But Jesus answers her plea with the words one would expect a Jew to say to a Canaanite, "**It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs.**" (*Matthew 15:26, ESV*)

Some people, intent on punishment rather than mercy, admonish their pastor to rebuke the restless and not to give what is holy to dogs. They seek to divide the unified body of the church, denying forgiveness, looking to divide the wheat from the chaff before the proper time. It is true, there are those who purposely disturb the peace, cause scandal, and sin against their fellow believers, but such as these are not to be denied mercy. True fellowship calls for seeking them out, reproaching them for their divisive ways while also offering forgiveness and reconciliation. Is this not what our loving God has done for you? Should you not be loving? Yes, you are to be loving, but there is a caveat to Christian love. Christian love does not carry with it, unlimited tolerance. Jesus tells us that when a sinner is unrepentant and refuses to heed the loving admonition and desire for reconciliation of the church, the church is to "**let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.**" (*Matthew 18:17, ESV*) But the problem with the disciples in this event is that they didn't want to listen to the woman in the first place. She is not a Jew, therefore, treat her as a Gentile and a tax collector. Not a good way to evangelize.

Having heard the response of Jesus, the Canaanite woman is not dismayed. She had come to plead her case and she knew that if her Lord heard the earnestness of her plea, it would be granted. Therefore, she says, "**Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table.**" (*Matthew 15:27, ESV*)

Her faith is on full display. Moreover, her faith is a true faith, for true faith must always be accompanied by self-accusation. So, yes, Lord, I am no better than a dog, unworthy of your affection. True faith sees the lack of human ability to conquer Satan and the sin he leads man into. True faith sees the frailty of the human condition and its propensity of offending our holy God. True faith seeks only the One who can answer faith's needs, true faith seeks the object of true faith, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. The Canaanite woman is a woman of true faith, seeking Jesus in her time of need.

Her faith is not in vain, for when Jesus hears her plea, He immediately says to her, **““O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire.” And her daughter was healed instantly.” (v. 28)**

Is your faith the faith of the Canaanite woman? Is your faith the faith of a first century martyr? Are you willing to humble yourself before the Lord? Are you willing to be abused, ridiculed, or embarrassed for your faith? Are you willing to admit that you are a poor miserable sinner, unfit to be forgiven by God for the sake of His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ? Are you willing to admit that you are first and foremost, a sinner, one who would rather seek after the world than after God? Are you also willing to admit that you cannot save yourself from your sinful condition? Are you willing to admit that you are in need of a Savior? If so, then count yourself blessed. Count yourself as one of the Elect of God, for you have received the greatest gift you could ever receive, saving faith in the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

So, when Satan oppresses you and he did the daughter of the Canaanite woman, how do you respond? Do you do as the Canaanite woman and seek out Jesus. Seeking Him through prayer, through meditation of His Word, through confession and absolution with the pastor, by coming to Jesus personally at the Altar rail, there to receive His precious Body and Blood in and under the bread and wine of Holy Communion for the forgiveness of your sins. I pray these are your responses when Satan oppresses you.

Ever since the Garden of Eden, Satan has afflicted man, we see that in today’s Gospel Reading. The same was true in the first couple of centuries of the Church, the followers of Christ were severely attacked by Satan hoping to crush their faith. Satan led men to do all manner of horrible things to the followers of Christ in the hope of getting them to recant their faith. But rather than recant, these Christians, in the face of this horrible persecution, gave birth to a Christians confession, the Apostles’ Creed. That Creed which defined their faith in a world filled with unbelievers. The Creed is simple enough; it contains three articles which focus on three divine objects; God the Father, the Creator, God the Son, the Redeemer, and God the Holy Spirit, the Sanctifier. Luther teaches that the article which speaks of Jesus confesses that, *“I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the virgin Mary, is my Lord, who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, delivered me and freed me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil, not with silver and gold but with his holy and precious blood and with his innocent sufferings and death, in order that I may be his, live under him in his kingdom, and serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, even as he is risen from the dead and lives and reigns to all eternity. This is most certainly true.”* This Creed affirms what Scripture has to say about our rescue from sin, death, and the devil; it comes only through the death of Jesus on the Altar of the Cross. For there He paid the entire penalty for your sin and guilt. There, He fully endured and appeased the wrath of God toward all people (universal atonement), thereby reconciling you to God, and there He destroyed the power of sin to enslave mankind.

This confession speaks of a faith that is as great as the faith of the Canaanite woman, a faith which turns to Jesus in every trial, believing without reservation that He will hear your plea for help and come to your rescue. Is this your faith? If so, then *Great is Your Faith!* In the name of Jesus. Amen.

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.