

# REMINISCERE (LENT 2)

**March 12 2017**

Old Test: Gen. 32:22-32

Epistle: 1 Thess. 4:1-7

Gospel: Matt. 15:21-28

## ***Standing..***

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Jacob of old wrestled with God,  
not letting Him go, until he received a blessing.

So it is with the Canaanite woman.  
She too, grabbing hold of the heavenly Man, Jesus,  
would not let Him go...until she received a blessing.

For clinging the way Jacob did he's renamed, "Israel."  
And for clinging to Christ, the Word made flesh,  
the Canaanite woman is praised for having such great  
faith.

Let us pray. These are Your words Holy Father. Sanctify us in  
the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

## ***Sitting..***

Hebrews 11:1 tells us, "Faith...is the conviction of things not  
seen."

Meaning that, our reason,  
which typically loves to lead, guide and direct us,  
takes a backseat to what is revealed about Christ,  
of how He defines reality and truth.  
When suffering comes,  
and most of you know that suffering will come  
it is incredibly tempting  
to abandon our faith and trust our  
reason instead.

The Scriptures don't tell us how, but the Canaanite woman has  
faith in Jesus.

What?! A Canaanite? I know...

The Canaanites were outside of the covenant the LORD God made  
with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They were an old, pagan race of  
idol worshippers—

Thus, Jews did not go near them.  
 You don't talk with them, eat with them, or touch them.  
 Marry one? Forget it—out of the question.  
 They were dogs.

But this woman has faith—  
 faith in Jesus—who is the Substance to which faith clings.  
 Beloved, faith is not an abstraction,  
 it's not an idea,  
 or a concept,  
 or a feeling.  
 Faith is a heartfelt confidence in the grace  
 and goodness of  
 God, which is learned and revealed through  
 the Word.

Somehow, this woman has heard of prophecies about the coming  
 Messiah,  
 and recognized Jesus as being the One who was fulfilling  
 them.

Moreover, she heard what Jesus was doing,  
 of His healings,  
 His miracles,  
 and His acts of mercy.

And particularly she's heard of how He,  
 with a mere word, expels demons from poor sufferers...  
 sufferers just... like... her... daughter.

These reports found fertile soil in her heart.  
 And now, word is, Jesus has come to her far corner of  
 Galilee.

She waits anxiously—and upon seeing Him, she offers her fervent  
 prayer.

She cries, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David."

"Lord, have mercy"—we know that. That's a common refrain. It's,  
 "Lord, help me."

In Greek it's, "Kyrie, eleison." Of which we chant, sing or  
 say

with great regularity around here. It's the cry of the  
 Church in all ages.

And why is that? Because we need God's help, we need  
 His mercy.

And gratefully this is what He shows—mercy.  
 He takes pity on us in our misery.

But along with her cry for help,  
 she adds, "Son of David..." That's a messianic title.

See, God made a promise to David that one of his sons—Someone from his genetic line—would be a greater king than David—bringing peace and reigning forever. This Son of David, this Messiah, this Christ, would usher in a glorious reign of blessing for Israel, which in turn would bless all the other nations. Most Israelites didn't believe this about Jesus...but she does.

This woman knows her stuff—  
 She went to Sunday School!

Yet to her prayer and her great confession, Jesus says...**nothing**.  
 God's silence is the worst kind of silence.  
 But all of God's saints experience it.

The Psalmist laments it, saying, "How long, O Lord? Will You forget me forever? How long will You hide Your face from me?"  
 (Psa 13:1)

Or this one, "To You I will cry, O Lord my Rock: Do not be silent to me, Lest, if You are silent to me, I become like those who go down to the pit." (Psa 28:1)

Our Lord Himself experienced it on the cross.  
 Saying, "My God, my God, why have You forsaken Me?"

Now I have no idea went through this woman's head at this point.  
 But, my guess is, if you were snubbed by Christ like this—  
 where He was as silent as a stump in your hour of  
 deepest need...

You would wonder, "Is He really good?"  
 Is He really the Helper I've heard about?  
 Is what I've heard even true?  
 Or, is it all make-believe?  
 What a Friend we have in Jesus?—  
 yeah, I'll say, some Friend.

The default mode for our sinful nature is to doubt God's Word.  
 Which eventually leads to despair.  
 And despair is crippling...

However, faith is not misled by God's silence—  
 Nor does faith dwell on what is not true.  
 Instead, it clings steadily and firmly to the report—  
 to the message—to the promise—to the bare Word alone.

The woman continues to press Jesus for help.  
 Even though—even though,  
     Jesus seems to be acting contrary to who she knew  
 Him to be.

The disciples are somewhat shocked.  
 Why is Jesus acting so harsh? So brusque...?  
     He always helps people.

So they, on her behalf, ask Jesus to do something.  
     I mean, she's doesn't seem to be going away.

And Jesus explains, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the  
 house of Israel."  
     That's a deal breaker.

But, the divine plan was...  
     to work out redemption in the Jewish nation.  
     Jesus wasn't going to move His ministry headquarters up to  
 Tyre and Sidon,  
     or any other Gentile area.  
     As soon as it was worked out in Israel,  
     it would be carried to the rest of the world.

So not only does Jesus ignore her—and walk on...  
     but now she hears that she doesn't make the cut.  
     That she's not one of the "chosen."  
     How dare she even talk to Him...

So what does she do now? Does she abandon the Word and go back  
 home?  
 Keep trying those homeopathic remedies for her daughter that she  
 knows don't work?  
 Does she forget all she's heard and believed about Jesus?

We would. She doesn't.  
 She clings to the Word, even though it's being forcefully torn  
 out of her.  
 She does not turn away from His stern answer, but still trusts  
 firmly that His goodness is hidden behind it. She does not  
 believe that Christ is or can be ungracious.

So, while Jesus is explaining His mission to the disciples,  
     The woman runs around in front,  
     falls on ground in utter humility and deepest appeal,

and begs for His help, "Lord, help me."

And He directly says,

"that she is a dog. Unworthy to share in the children's bread."

Put another way, "She's one of the damned—

She's one of the lost,

completely unworthy to share in the blessings He bestows."

Every homebound person I read this text to this week heard it and asked...

"Pastor, are you reading the Bible?"

"Pastor, are you sure that's Jesus?"

Sounds more like the Devil.

Indeed, it does.

Folks, God is a strange God; He's alien. At times, He's altogether unlike syrupy praise music we hear on the radio and at times unlike our sentimental hymns.

What is Jesus doing?

He's drawing out this woman's faith... It's why He's in this Gentile region.

Does He want to help her? Of course He does.

Jesus wants to answer her prayer and give her all that she needs, but we can't tell that yet.

He is showing His disciples, and thereby us, what faith looks like.

Which means believing that Jesus is merciful and He keeps His promises—

regardless of the suffering we currently experience.

Hard lesson? One of the toughest.

I see it all the time, and so do you. As soon as suffering comes, people determine, God isn't compassionate—God isn't kind—God is not merciful.

Something goes wrong in life, which it always will—and the first thing people punt is their faith—they stop praying and they stop coming to church.

They think, "What's the use?"

You know exactly what I'm talking about.

But I'm not dealing with those people this morning.

They aren't here. I'm dealing with you...

The interaction between Christ and the Canaanite woman shows us that sometimes Jesus hides Himself from us to exercise our faith—doing so at the absolute worst time.

Namely, when you're bombarded by temptations,  
suffering under your sins and the sins of people around  
you.

This whole time she has overlooked what she sees, hears, and feels.

She believes Jesus was sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel

but that somehow He can bring her into that fold.

She believes His mercy is wide enough to embrace even the likes of her.

And though we're taken aback by the harshness of Jesus' words, she's not.

She says, "Lord, if that's Your word for me, then I'll take it."

"Dogs never had it so good under Your table."

"Because You're not going to let them starve."

It's as if the words of the Introit were emblazoned on her heart,

"Remember O Lord, remember Your tender mercies  
and Your lovingkindness for they are form  
old."

Of this, Luther says,

She's trapped Jesus in His own words and He loves it.

She's got Him, and she's not about to let Him go—just like Jacob of old.

And to this our Lord says, "Woman, you have great faith."

There are only two people—

from Genesis to Revelation who are praised for their faith.

And she's one of them.

For hers was a faith that doggedly clings to Jesus even when He appears to reject her.

And now, warmly, gently, Jesus says to her, "Let it be done for you as you desire."

And at that moment, the demon leaves her daughter.

So, is Jesus really merciful? The Canaanite woman's voice still cries out, "Yes. He is."

The Holy Spirit cries out, "Yes. He is." And faith agrees. Yes. He is.

May the Lord continue to grant us such faith through His Word and Spirit.

In the Holy name of Jesus, Amen.

**Standing..** And now may the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

**Sitting..**