

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

The Scriptures don't tell us how, but the Canaanite woman has faith in Jesus.
What?! A Canaanite? I know...
You think we have issues with race relations...ours don't compare.

The Canaanites were an old, pagan race of idol worshippers who possessed the Promised Land prior to Israel's arrival. They were outside of the covenant the LORD God made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.
Thus, Jews did not go near them.

Jews did not talk with Canaanites,
 eat with Canaanites or touch them.
 Marry one? Forget it—out of the question.
 Canaanites were dogs.

But this Canaanite 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,
 a concept,
 nor 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 heard of prophecies about the coming Messiah,
 and recognized Jesus as being the One fulfilling them.
 Moreover, she heard of Jesus' healings,
 His miracles and His acts of mercy.

She's heard of how He,
 with a mere word, expels demons from poor sufferers...
 sufferers just... like... her... daughter.
 Demons exist? Indeed, they do.

These reports about Jesus find 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.

“Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David.”

“Lord, have mercy”—we know that. 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.
 The Lord 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, for she knows who He is.

Yet to her prayer and her great confession, Jesus says...**nothing**.

Agghh, 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?"

I have no idea what 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 and goodness.

Which, when that doubt is allowed to linger, it 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 Canaanite 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 shows mercy.

So they, on the woman's behalf, ask Jesus to do something.

I mean, she's doesn't seem to be going away.

Yet Jesus explains to them, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”

That’s a deal breaker.

The divine plan was...

to work out redemption in the Jewish nation which would be carried to the rest of the world.

We say the same in our liturgy—

a light to lighten the Gentiles and the glory of your people Israel.

So, not only does Jesus ignore the Canaanite woman—and walk on...

but now she hears that she doesn’t make the cut.

That she’s not of the “chosen.”

What will she do? Will she abandon the Word and go back home?

Keep trying the homeopathic remedies for her daughter that she tried before?

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 from 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 front,

falls on ground in utter humility and deepest appeal,

and begs for His help, “Lord, help me.”

And Jesus 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.”

Sounds more like the Devil than Jesus, doesn’t it?

But 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 give her all that she needs,

but we can't tell that—not yet.

We have to trust what we learn in John 2 that...

Jesus knew all people...for he himself knew what was in man.

Jesus knows faith resides in this Canaanite woman.
 She's already invoked Him as the Messiah—already believing He's God.
 And she doesn't see his comment about being a dog as an insult.

Jesus 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.

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

Something goes wrong in life—and the first thing people punt is their faith—
 they stop praying, stop giving thanks and stop coming to church.
 They think, "What's the use?"

But the interaction between Christ and the Canaanite woman shows us that
 sometimes Jesus hides Himself from us to exercise our faith—to test it—to
 squeeze it out of us—doing so at what we consider to be the absolute worst
 time.

The Canaanite woman believes Jesus was sent to the lost sheep of the house
 of Israel
 but somehow—somehow He can bring her into that fold, that
 His mercy is wide enough to embrace even the likes of her.

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

She says, "Lord, dogs never had it so good under Your table."
 "Because You will not 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 from old."

She's got Jesus—trapped Him in His own words, and she's not about to let
 Him go—
 just like Jacob of old—who says tells the Lord,
 "I won't let you go until you bless me."

And to this our Lord says, "O 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.

Faith keeps clinging to Jesus even when it seems that He's turned His back on you.

So, is Jesus really merciful?

The Canaanite woman cries out, "Yes. He is."

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

Yes. He is merciful, and the bread that falls from the Master's table is not crumbs—

it's the Bread of Life—here...for you.

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.