

2nd Sunday in Lent—Reminiscere—March 5, 2023

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Sometimes what your faith needs is to be ignored by God. Sometimes God needs to tell you “No” so that you would see how he says “yes.” Sometimes you need to be called a dog so that you would trust even more steadfastly in God’s mercy found in Christ. Jesus knew that’s what the Canaanite woman needed in the reading today. The Lord exercised her faith, and he does the same for you. But the thing about these things is they are hard. Exercise is hard because your muscles are strained. They are torn down and then built back up bigger and stronger. Likewise, the discipline of a father humbles the son. Suffering, Christian suffering can be those things and sent from God yet even in these times of testing, the Lord is caring for you and this is for your benefit.

It’s good when God tests you. You might not always think this is the case, at least not a first. But it’s often like that when you are tested, stretched, and just get outside of where you want things to be in your lives. Jesus never promised you times of prosperity and ease in this world. In fact, the opposite is the case as he would often speak about when times of trial, tribulation and persecution come. Now, to be sure, you know that God never tempts you, that’s the devil, the world, and your fallen flesh as you heard about last week. No, God doesn’t tempt you, but he most definitely tests you, gives you times of trial, and yes at times crosses to bear. His purpose in all of this is your benefit as passages such as James 1 speak about and a sign of your sonship that he is your loving Father as Hebrews 12 teaches. You know this and see this in other places in your lives. You test your kids for them to grow and learn and the same with discipline. Do they always like these things? Of course not, but in the end, they are better off for it and you as parents do it because you love them.

Consider all of this today, this second Sunday in Lent. In the Gospel reading Jesus, seemingly, ignores, excludes, and then insults this woman. Yet you learn from this encounter something about your lives in Christ lived in faith toward him. Jesus drives and pursues faith in his people so that it becomes strong and firm. Listen again to those words recorded by Matthew. “Jesus went away from there and withdrew to the district of Tyre and Sidon. 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.” That stands out here. Look at what Jesus does here with this woman. In what appears to be rude he is refining her. So, what’s going on?

Mark’s Gospel has a parallel account of this in Mark 7. In that reading Mark tells you that the woman had heard of Jesus. She knew who he is and what he does. That’s why she comes to him and in this reading from Matthew calls him, “Lord, Son of David.” This is like what you heard a few weeks ago when the blind man called out to Jesus as the Son of David to have mercy on him as well. The Canaanite woman, a gentile (a Canaanite), heard the word about Jesus and she believed it otherwise she wouldn’t have been before him praying for her daughter. She knew her daughter needed the saving hands of the Savior. She went to him in faith trusting that he would act as she knew him to be according to his word. What was the response? Jesus ignored her.

Learn something from this woman about your Lord and the example of faith the Bible reveals to you. There are times God appears to ignore you or your prayers fall upon deaf ears. Perhaps there are times when God doesn’t answer right away and leaving you “on hold” so to speak. So, what should be your response in this time in your life? Where do you run when God ignores you? Do you go to his control, his sovereignty, or his power? You can find many devotionals in Christian bookstores which will tell you those things. In times of uncertainty, they will have you go looking to God upward and in his power or in a general and abstract concept that things will be ok. While there are elements of truth in

those things, there's no real consolation and certainty. There's searching for the unknown rather than clinging in faith to what is known.

So where do you go? Peter asked, "Lord to whom shall we go, you have the words of eternal life." Control and God's working, while true realities, don't provide comfort that can come only in Christ. When God is trying you, stretching you, exercising your faith, or even disciplining you to the point where it hurts, and you are face down on the ground pleading with God for help the last place you want to look is God's control. No, you need God in his mercy. Go running, no go begging on your hands and knees clinging to his mercy. Where is his mercy found? It's found solely in Christ. How do you know and cling to his mercy? God's promises in Christ for you. You go back to his word. That's exactly what the woman did in the reading. Jesus was in control, but she appealed to his mercy as she knew him in the word, she had heard about him. She is persistent in this trust.

Going on Matthew continues, "And his disciples came and begged him, saying, 'Send her away, for she is crying out after us.' He answered, 'I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.' But she came and knelt before him, saying, 'Lord, help me.'" Think about that here what this woman does and speaks. Even despite the fact Jesus, in a sense, said, "I didn't come for this gentile" she goes after him. She came and knelt [fell on her face] and said, "Lord, help me." She knew she didn't have a place in God's Kingdom by right, entitlement or even lineage. She appealed to God's mercy.

What happened next is both mind-boggling and beautiful. "And he [Jesus] answered, 'It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs.'" She said, 'Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table.' Then Jesus answered her, 'O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire.' And her daughter was healed instantly." This Canaanite woman holds God's word before Christ. She appeals to his mercy and sees Jesus as the one who alone gives healing and redemption. Great is her faith which trusts God's mercy found in Christ.

God strengthens faith through suffering. He did that with Jacob. He did that with the Canaanite woman. He does that with you. In Romans 5:1-5 God says. "Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that 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 through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us."

Now it should be clarified God is talking about the suffering of a Christian and the suffering which you do not inflict upon yourself. You kick the wall and break your foot, that's your own fault. No, what you see here is this suffering, exercising of your faith, and at times discipline which comes from your confession of Christ and his word and/or the things you face in your life living in this fallen world and yet belong to the Lord. Fix your eyes on Jesus for through him you have peace with God. That's the key and the cornerstone of it all. The Lord has redeemed you by his blood and he has claimed you as his own in the waters of your baptism. Your faith then, knows God to be merciful because Christ has been revealed to you and you the Father through Christ. Everything in your Christian faith is seen through Christ crucified and risen for you and in him everything holds together.

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Martin Luther once preached in a sermon in 1530, “Since we know then that it is God’s good pleasure that we should suffer, and that God’s glory is manifested in our suffering, better than in any other way, and since we are the kind of people who cannot hold on to the Word and our faith without suffering, and moreover since we have the noble, previous promise that the cross which God sends to us is not a bad thing, but rather an utterly precious and noble holy thing, why should we not be bold to suffer? As for those who will not suffer, let them go and be cavaliers; we preach this only to the devout who want to be Christians, the others wouldn’t carry it out anyhow. After all, we have so many assurances and promises that he will not allow us to stick in our suffering but will help us out of it, even though all men should doubt it. Therefore, even though it hurts, so be it, you have to go through some suffering anyhow; things cannot always go smoothly. It is just as well, nay, a thousand times better, to have suffered for the sake of Christ, who promised us comfort and help in suffering, than to suffer and despair and perish without comfort and help for the sake of the devil.”

You will face times of trial, testing, and suffering in this life, these things will happen. Learn though from this Canaanite woman, though, what it means to never let go of God’s word, his promises, even if everything you are seeing and experiencing seems to point you otherwise. In this way too, you will rejoice in your sufferings knowing that the Lord is refining you and pointing you to what you have in Christ now and the future glory to come.

There is an admonishment to you in all of this today, as well, which both warns you and encourages you. You must arm yourself with God’s word. You must be hearing the word of God regularly. You must be a frequent guest at the Lord’s Supper for even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from the master’s table, and you must pray without ceasing. Likewise, often when the New Testament talks about suffering in this world as a Christian it both assumes and teaches you will be confessing God’s word faithfully in your life and standing upon it. It never once teaches you to cower down to the ways and thoughts of the world and compromise God’s word. No, Christians suffer all, even death, rather than fall away from Christ and what his word teaches. Will you suffer when you do this? Yes, you will, and it will come from your friends, your family, and all around you. But you know who else experienced this? The Apostles, the saints who have gone before you, and most especially your Lord Jesus himself. But in all these things you have the promise that God will not put you to shame, he will guard and keep you, and you are blessed in all this time as you look forward to the glory to come.

The encouragement in this all is that God is the God of mercy and has mercy upon you. That’s your Lord’s promise to you. He guards and keeps you in his care through the means of grace and he shows you where you are to look in this life as face suffering or times of peace and joy. No matter the circumstance, the object is always the same, it’s Christ for there in him you behold God for you and see God as the merciful Lord who doesn’t call you to search for him in the heavens or throw up your hands in despair resigning yourself to think about all that is unknown. No, your Lord gives you true consolation and peace. So, when the cancer strikes, when your loved one dies, when you suffer for seeking first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness, when the prayers seem to be unanswered, and when the hits keep coming, you call God to “Remember your mercy, O Lord, and your steadfast love, for they have been from of old.” Say that to God. Pray that to God. Hold God to those promises he has made to you.

What does this mean? You hold Christ before the throne of God in your prayers and say confidently and in the humility of faith, “I know I don’t deserve a thing Lord, yet here is Jesus who has paid the price I owe and who gives my soul rest even as his yoke is easy, and his burden is light. Here is the Lord who laid aside his glory and lived the perfect righteous life all for my sake and endured the suffering and shame of the cross so that now I have his righteousness and

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life in return. Remember your mercy O Lord, see the nails and wounds of Jesus, and see you have redeemed me. You forgive my sin, and you give me eternal life.” Dear people of God, that is the suffering of the Christian that holds on to God’s mercy and rejoices in Christ.

In your life as a baptized child of God, never let go of Jesus. The times will come and have already when you are stretched in your faith. The devil, the world, and your fallen flesh would have you go looking for answers, an easy way out, or find comfort in something or someone else rather than digging in your heels more firmly in the word of God. God tests you and wrestles with you at times like this though not to lead you into sin and away from him but that you would hear his word, pray more, receive his sacraments more, and go running to his church even more. Blessed are you when God tests you and sends you to Christ.

Are the trials and tests of God easy or always known? No, they are not, but the promises of God are for you that he will not forsake you. He will test you, to be sure, but “a bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not quench.” Clinging to the word of God you will not fall away; even if it should seem like God is against you calling you a dog when you have God’s word and look to Christ crucified you have everything. You may come out of the encounter with a hip out place or some nasty scars. You may have lost the love and companionship of some friends and family members, a job, a team or playing time, or some other things that sting and leave a mark, but you have eternal life and joy that Christ has won and given to you. “Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.” God has promised and given you eternal life in your baptism. He came to save sinners; he came to save you and if he must call you a dog in the process for your good then let him call you a dog every second of every day.

Dear saints of God, listen to this all today and remember your Lord is merciful for you in Christ. Fix your eyes on Jesus the author and perfecter of your faith and you will never be put to shame because he endured the shame of the cross in your place. And know too that the day is coming when this world will end, and you will see fully the eternal God in all his glory. You won’t need any more testing to refine you on that day because you will see him clearly and no longer dimly as in a mirror. See him risen from the dead as the assurance that your peace and place before the throne of God and his kingdom is secure. Hold God to it that he remembers his mercy and steadfast love, he delights in that, the faith he has given to you, as he delights in you on account of Christ. He has accomplished it all for you and redefines your suffering through the lens of the Lord who suffered for you. See the wounds of Jesus and see that your Lord sympathizes with your weakness even as he intercedes for you by his blood. His power is made perfect in weakness. He destroyed death by his death. Christ crucified and risen changes everything. Rejoice this day and call upon the Lord. Be persistent in the faith the Lord has given you and strengthens you in as you go through this life. Desire to be the dog that eats the crumbs from the master’s table and know that your place is far better. Your place is at the eternal wedding feast which knows no end. That’s what you are promised, and you see as you behold your Lord crucified and risen for you. So, remember his mercies and call upon the Lord to remember them as well. He is faithful, he will surely do it.

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.