

Reminiscere
St. Matthew 15:21-28
March 17th, 2019
Sts. Peter & Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church, UAC
Simpsonville, SC
St. Michael and All Angels Evangelical Lutheran Mission, UAC
Augusta, GA
Pastor Jerald Dulas

Great Is Your Faith

In Nomine Iesu!

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit before Sermon:

O Lord, send out Thy Light and Thy Truth, let them lead us. O Lord, open Thou my lips, that my mouth may show forth Thy praise. O Lord, graciously preserve me, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected. Amen.

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

Our Lord + Jesus Christ in the beginning of chapter 15 of the Apostle and Evangelist St. Matthew's Gospel has a debate with the scribes and Pharisees, who were sent from Jerusalem to the region in which He was at that time, which was the region around the Sea of Galilee. Our Lord had just finished feeding the five thousand men plus women and children, and had appeared in the night to His disciples walking on water to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. So, the scribes and Pharisees were sent to our Lord to test Him. Now, remember that last week, on *Invocavit*, that our Lord endured the testing and temptation of the devil in the wilderness. This week, *Reminiscere*—meaning "Remember me," from the first line of the Introit—our Lord is tested by the scribes and Pharisees before He encounters the Canaanite woman with the severely demon-possessed daughter.

Why do I bring up things which are not in our text? Because they set the stage for today's Gospel. The point of the beginning of chapter 15 of the Apostle and Evangelist St. Matthew's Gospel is that the scribes and Pharisees—the religious leaders of the Jews—have rejected our Lord. And remember also, that after the feeding of the five thousand in the Apostle and Evangelist St. John's Gospel, when our Lord told them that whoever wanted to be saved must eat His flesh and blood, many were offended at Him, and stopped following Him. Therefore, at the beginning of today's Gospel we see our Lord having been rejected by many of the Jews and the religious leaders of the Jews. This is why our Lord travels to the region of Tyre and Sidon at the beginning of our Gospel for today. All of this sets the stage for events of our Gospel reading today.

Tyre and Sidon was Gentile territory. And there He meets a woman of Canaan. Now remember that the Canaanites were the people that possessed the land of Israel before the Israelites. The Israelites were to destroy all of the Canaanites—all of their worship places; their idols; their livestock; everything—nothing was to remain. This was supposed to be done, so that the false religion of the Canaanites would not corrupt the religion and worship of the Jews. As we read about when we read through the book of Numbers this week. However, the Israelites did not obey the Lord in this and allowed some to remain alive. They did not end up conquering this region of Tyre and Sidon. In this we can see our Lord's mercy, for He allows it to be so and does not condemn the Israelites for doing so, because He has plans for these Gentiles.

And we see this plan fulfilled today when a Canaanite woman comes to our Lord in the region of Tyre and Sidon. Now, this woman represents all Gentiles, especially those Gentiles who would later become Christians. And in a sense represents the Church, for she cries out to the Lord not for herself, but for her daughter who is severely demon-possessed. This is the state of everyone, we are oppressed by the devil and his angels; we are prone to idolatry, we are filled with doubt and despair when trials and temptations surround us. The rest of the world is even worse off, for they live without the hope of salvation; they live without true faith in the One True God Who can save them and they seek after salvation in very many false ways, especially the false notion that doing good works will earn them salvation. But like the Church does for all those who struggle with the battle against the devil, the world and sinful flesh, both within the Church and outside of the Church, this Canaanite, Gentile, Syro-Phoenician woman intercedes to the Lord on behalf of her daughter that He might have mercy. And notice, she does not say, "Have mercy on my daughter," but, "*Have, mercy on me*" for the sake of my daughter.

Her daughter's pain is her pain. The pain that the world feels on account of sin is the Church's pain. Whether they realize it or not. Holy Mother Church mourns not only over her own sinfulness and unfaithfulness, but especially does she mourn for the sinfulness and unfaithfulness of the world and all those who reject our Lord and the salvation found in Him alone.

Here is where the name of this Sunday comes into play—*Reminiscere*. *Reminiscere* means "Remember." It is based on the first line of the Introit for today, "*Remember, O Lord, Your tender mercies and Your loving-kindnesses, for they are from of old.*" Today's Gospel is all about our Lord's mercy. It is about His loving-kindnesses. It is about the mercy that our Lord + Jesus shows towards the Gentile people, that is, you and I, who were not born a part of the Jewish nation. Although it does not appear to be that way right away for the woman of Canaan. However, this seeming rejection of this Canaanite woman by the Lord, is for our benefit, and the benefit of all those who were witness to this event—to see our Lord's mercy.

The Lord, having been rejected by the Jews, is confronted by a Gentile, who clearly shows that she believes He is the One True Lord and Savior—the Messiah. She does not address Him as "Teacher" or "Master," but "*Lord, Son of David.*" In this title she proclaims exactly what she believes about Him. He is "*Lord,*" that is, He is God. And, He is "*Son of David,*" that is, He is man. This Gentile woman confesses our Lord to be exactly what and who He is—the God/man come into this world to redeem mankind from all their sin. What great faith this woman shows already! But the response of our Lord does not reveal that this is the case. What is our Lord's response to this great faith? "*He answered her not a word.*" Silence. This silence appears to us as cruelty. When we petition our Lord for the things that we need to support this body and life, and we are apparently met with silence, it appears as cruelty to us. It appears to us as if our Lord does not love us; does not desire our good, but instead is mocking us and enjoys our suffering; that He has no desire to rescue us and draw us out of our suffering and trial.

Many who find themselves in such a situation give up. They stop petitioning our Lord for His mercy. They try to seek help from some other false god, or their own striving and work. But not this woman, so great is her faith, so great is her belief that the Lord will not deny her prayer that she cries out even more. Her cries of mercy are felt by the Apostles. They are so moved by this woman's cries of mercy for her daughter, that instead of seeing her suffer anymore, they intercede on her behalf to the Lord, asking Him that if He is not going to help her, at least "*send her away, for she cries out after*" them. So great is their compassion for her that they do not want to hear her suffering anymore!

But it appears that even the prayers of the saints are not able to help this woman. For our Lord says that He "*was not sent to except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.*" No longer is He silent,

but instead offers an explanation. But even this explanation is not directed at the woman, but at the disciples. This is also true of the prayers of the saints. When some great need arises in which the whole Church lifts up her voice to the Heavenly Father on behalf of someone, the only response we seem to receive is His Word. Again, there are those who lose heart, when after their own prayers are seemingly met with silence, and the prayers of the whole Church are seemingly met with silence, they give up. But not this woman of Canaan! The more our Lord seemingly reviles her, the more she digs in her heels and requests our Lord more fervently.

We are told that she *“came and worshiped Him, saying, ‘Lord, help me.’”* Here we see the faith of this woman even more clearly, but even this act of worship is not the height of this woman’s faith. In worshiping our Lord, she truly shows that she believes Him to be the One True God. And remember, that this woman is a Gentile. The Gentiles had false gods and worshiped idols made by hand. This Gentile woman has forsaken her false gods and idols and worships the One True God. She truly stands in contrast to the scribes and Pharisees who rejected our Lord because He did not wash His hands before eating, even though He had just fed five thousand men plus women and children.

Our Lord + Jesus was sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, but they rejected Him and having been rejected by the Jews, our Lord offers salvation to the Gentiles. That is why this woman is a picture of the things to come. She is a picture of the Gentiles forsaking their false gods and idols and clinging to and worshiping the One True God and Savior, our Lord + Jesus Christ. This is done to for the benefit of the Apostles, who will later go and preach to the Gentiles, that they might see the faith in the Lord that the Gentiles would have.

Now we would think that even after this woman comes and kneels before Him in worship that our Lord would show the mercy that she desires, but not so. Instead He says, *“It is not good to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs.”* This woman is a “dog.” She is a sinner, and all of us who are sinners are dogs. We live purely at the mercy of our master, and receive only what our master gives us. Many people in the world today, even within some so-called Christian church bodies, reject the title of sinner, that is, of “dog.” Our nature does not want us to be labeled as a sinner, we cringe at that title. We want to instead be called good and faithful; we want to be called lords and masters. But our Lord, like this woman of Canaan, calls us sinners and dogs.

However, this woman does not cringe at the title like most would. Instead, she embraces it, and takes it even further. Our Lord calls the Israelites children; she calls them masters. And, she does not demand to sit at the table and receive the full meal, but is content to sit under the table and receive whatever crumbs may fall—whatever the Jews reject. Here we have it! The Jews have rejected our Lord; seek to have Him killed, and here this woman is willing to receive whatever crumbs our Lord may toss her that the Jews have rejected. Here we see the extent of this woman’s great faith. She is content to receive from the Lord whatever He is willing to offer. Oh, that our prayers would exemplify such great faith; that we would be content with whatever crumbs our Lord would offer to us, instead of grumbling that we have not received the full meal that others seem to be enjoying!

It is here that our Lord shows His great mercy toward us and this woman. For He says to her, *“O woman, great is your faith! Let it be to you as you desire.”* The Lord fulfills the woman’s desire; He grants her will. This is the same as saying that her desire—her will—is the same as the Lord. This is why this woman’s faith is so great, she has made her will the same as the Lord’s will. Oh, that we would have faith so great that our will was always the same as our Lord’s will; that we would always desire to live as He would have us live; that we would not live as dogs and sinners, but would live as true children at the Master’s table. And in a sense, that is what our Lord is granting to this woman, a place at the table as a child of God—no longer is she a dog.

We learn from Psalm 22:16: *“For dogs have surrounded Me; The congregation of the wicked*

has enclosed Me. They pierced My hands and My feet." The Jews who crucified our Lord + Jesus were no longer called sons, but were now called dogs. Those who reject the Lord are not sons, but dogs, and those who believe on the Lord, are no longer called dogs, but are called sons. You are all now sons of God, having been baptized with the Holy Ghost, and having been washed free of your sins in the waters of Holy Baptism and having been declared free from sin in the Absolution. You are now free to come to the Holy Supper of our Lord, and eat the meal of the children of God. At this altar you will not receive crumbs of forgiveness, but you will be given the full meal of forgiveness for all your sins through our Lord's Body and Blood given in bread and wine. And with forgiveness of your sins, you will receive also eternal life and salvation. Come and receive the bread of Heaven, given for you. In the Name of our Lord + Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit after Sermon:

Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy Name give glory! I will extol Thee, O Lord, and I will praise Thy Name forever and ever. Amen.

The Votum:

The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria!