

Reminiscere
St. Matthew 15:21-28
February 28th, 2021
Sts. Peter and Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church, UAC
Simpsonville, SC
St. Michael and All Angels Evangelical Lutheran Mission, UAC
Augusta, GA
Pastor Jerald Dulas

Lord, Help Me!

In Nomine Iesu!

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

Prayer in Pulpit before Sermon:

Lord God, heavenly Father, grant us, we beseech Thee, by Thy Holy Spirit, that He may strengthen our hearts and confirm our faith and hope in Thy grace and mercy, so that, although we have reason to fear because of our conscience, our sin, and our unworthiness, we may nevertheless, with the woman of Canaan, hold fast to Thy grace, and in every trial and temptation find Thee a very present help and refuge, through Thy beloved Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, one true God, world without end. Amen.

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

Last Sunday, on *Invocavit*, we heard about how the Lord + Jesus defeated the temptations of the devil by using the Word of God. This was His greatest weapon against the assaults of the devil and his lies. It was the only weapon that He needed to defeat the devil. From this we learned that we also have a great weapon against the devil, the world and our sinful flesh. We also have the Word of God as a tool and weapon to defend ourselves against temptation and trial. As the name of last Sunday implies, *Invocavit*, we are to call on the Lord God by His holy Word, and He will teach us how we resist the temptations of the devil, the world and our flesh. By Word and prayer, we resist temptation.

Today's Gospel takes it even a step farther. Last Sunday we call upon the Lord God, this Sunday—*Reminiscere*—He remembers us and delivers us. As we sang in the Introit, our Lord God remembers His tender mercies and His lovingkindnesses toward us. He does not let the enemy triumph over us. He delivers us out of all our troubles. Our Lord + Jesus shows us this in the Gospel reading from the Apostle and Evangelist St. Matthew. He has tender mercy and lovingkindness for this Syro-Phoenician woman, even though He was not sent but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. He delivers her from the enemy—the demon—plaguing her daughter. But before He shows His great mercy and kindness, He needs to show His Apostles and us the great faith of this woman. He shows us that just as we defeat temptation by persistent use of the Word of God—countering the lies of the devil, the world and our flesh with the truth of the Word of God—our Lord God remembers His tender mercies and lovingkindnesses through persistent prayer to Him.

This Canaanite woman has great faith! She never doubts for a second that the Lord + Jesus can help her and her daughter. She also gives a great example for prayer. For she acknowledges, just as we learn in the Small Catechism, that she is worthy of none of the things for which she prays, but she asks for them still, because she knows that the Lord + Jesus is merciful and compassionate toward all those who cry to Him. Our Lord + Jesus shows us the faith in this woman by first ignoring her. She cries for out to Him to have mercy on her, because her daughter is “severely demon-possessed.” But He

answers her not a word. Her cries for mercy fall on deaf ears it would seem.

The same is true for us at times. Our cries to the Lord God in prayer seem to fall on deaf ears. Our Lord does not answer us—or so it seems—and all we seem to receive from Him is silence; no response. It is easy for us to give up in our prayer. The Lord God does not seem to be listening to us, why should we trouble ourselves further? Why should we wear out our knees with petitions that fall on deaf ears? Certainly, the world and our flesh want us to believe this lie. The Lord God does not hear us or care about us they would have us believe. That certainly seems to be the case with this woman who is foreign decent.

Furthermore, not only is she a foreigner, but she is a Canaanite woman. She is from the people who the Lord God wanted to be utterly wiped from the Earth on account of their idolatry and rejection of the Lord God as the only true God. The Israelites were to utterly destroy the Canaanites for their false worship and take possession of the land of Canaan, so that the Lord God would be their one and only God. As we learn from the holy Scriptures, the Israelites did not fully drive out the Canaanites, and instead of having the Lord God as their one and only God, they adopted the false gods and false worship of the Canaanites. The corruption became so deep that the Lord God eventually had to exile both kingdoms; first the Northern Kingdom of Israel, and then the Southern Kingdom of Judah.

This is where the Apostle and Evangelist St. Matthew makes a point in his Gospel reading that can be easily overlooked. Notice where the Lord + Jesus is at when He meets this Syro-Phoenician Canaanite woman? He is in the land of Tyre and Sidon. Tyre and Sidon border the coast of the Mediterranean Sea in the Northern Kingdom of Israel. The Southern Kingdom, Judah, was brought back after seventy years in exile. The Northern Kingdom was never brought back in its entirety. The kingdom of Assyria transplanted its own residents in among the remaining Israelites and this is what became known as Samaria; where we get Samaritans. In other words, the land that our Lord + Jesus is passing through at the time of this Gospel reading is a land of exile. Tyre and Sidon were especially known as corrupt places being on the coast and receiving visitors from all the foreign countries bringing their idolatry and false worship with them.

Our Lord + Jesus last week fought the devil in the wilderness after fasting forty days and forty nights. He fought the devil in the devil's kingdom, on the devil's terms after being weakened by fasting. This week our Lord + Jesus once again goes into the devil's stronghold, the region of Tyre and Sidon, to show us the faith of a foreigner—a woman from the people who were supposed to be destroyed on account of their false worship. This is why the Lord + Jesus is so determined to show us her great faith. This woman, being a Canaanite, should have no use for the Lord + Jesus. She should have her own false gods. If she worshiped false gods, they are not mentioned. If she did have false gods, it is clear that she has forsaken them, for they provided no help. They could not provide any help, because all false gods are not real; they can provide no help or comfort. But the Lord + Jesus is full of mercy and compassion, and in this trust, she clings most desperately.

This is why after our Lord + Jesus seems to ignore her and answers her not a word, she cries out all the more. Our Lord's silence is met with even more fervent prayer. Oh, that we would follow the example of this outsider—this foreigner! For when it seems that the Lord is not going to give her an answer—not even a yes or a no—she cries out all the more. How great it would be if to our Lord's silence we cried out to Him even more fervently! She cries out so much that the Apostles beg the Lord + Jesus to send her away. He did not give her a “no” to her prayer because of her faith and He wanted to show us all that. So too, did He have no desire to send her away, either. He allows her to continue to cry out after Him. He wants this woman to be persistent, because He knows that she will continue to be persistent, and it is all for our benefit to show us what great faith can do, and how we too should pray to our Lord God in fervent and persistent prayer.

Her persistence pays off, for He finally gives her an answer; a response. It is still not a “no,” but an explanation. He was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. He was sent to call all the people of this land of exile to Himself. His concern is for His people, not for outsiders. He has come to the region of Tyre and Sidon to bring back into His sheepfold the lost sheep of the house of Israel. What does He meet in this land of exile? He meets a foreigner. He meets someone from the people of Canaan. No mention is made of any of the lost sheep of Israel needing Him at this point. Only this Syro-Phoenician woman comes to Him to be rescued from the severe attacks of a demon against her daughter.

What is the woman’s reply to our Lord’s response to her? She bows down before Him on her knees and worships Him, saying, “Lord, help me!” What great faith! Even with all the outward rebuffs of the Lord + Jesus, she still clings in faith to Him even more fervently. She will not let Him go until He gives her what she desires. What a way to pray! She prays until she gets what she desires. And so, what does she get for all this fervent prayer to the Lord + Jesus? She gets one more rebuff. The bread is not for the little dogs, it is for the children. The food is for the children, not the pets.

One final rebuff of our Lord + Jesus gets one final expression of faith from the Canaanite woman. The foreigner acknowledges her unworthiness. She is not a child. She IS a little dog. And as a little dog she is used to receiving the crumbs that fell to her. This is most likely how she heard of the tender mercies of the Lord + Jesus; how she heard what great things He did. She had received the crumbs from the table of the children of Israel and heard and believed the Word of God and believed on the Lord + Jesus. She knew that He could and would heal her daughter of being severely demon-possessed. And she would not go home empty-handed. Then comes the great response that shows her true faith, “Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.”

What great faith! Through her fervent prayer she reminded the Lord + Jesus of His tender mercies and lovingkindnesses. Reminiscere—remember—O Lord Your tender mercies and your lovingkindnesses, for they are from of old. Our Lord God is and always has been tender-hearted and compassion toward His people; toward all those who cling to Him as their one, true God. He shows mercy to thousands of generations to those who forsake false gods and false worship and love Him and keep His Commandments. For her faith; for her trust in the one, true God, she gets what she desired. From that very hour, her daughter was healed.

This foreigner in the land of exile in the region of Tyre and Sidon received what was meant for the lost sheep of the house of Israel. On account of her faith, it was meant for her. She was content with crumbs, but received the bread from the Bread of Life Himself.

When it seems like our prayers are going unheard and unanswered, we also may feel unworthy of the bread, and would be content with the crumbs. Indeed, the temptation and lie of the devil, the world and our flesh is that we are not even worthy of the crumbs. Therefore, the temptation is to forsake our prayers; to think that our prayer will never be heard or answered. This Syro-Phoenician woman teaches us otherwise. This outsider shows us how to pray properly: with all faith that the Lord will answer our prayers; acknowledging our sins and the fact that we are unworthy of all for which we pray, but confident that our Lord God will give us what we want because He is merciful and compassionate. He will especially grant to us the forgiveness of our sins.

For our Lord does not desire to give us the crumbs that fall from the table. He did not give the Canaanite woman crumbs, but gave her the Bread of Life—He gave her Himself. He gives us Himself, too. When we come to this holy altar, we receive from our Lord His very Body and His very Blood in bread and wine. He gives us Himself as an answer to our prayer for forgiveness. Not only does He give us forgiveness of sins in this blessed meal at the Master’s table, but He also richly blesses us with eternal life and salvation in Him alone. Therefore, my dear friends, let us with all fervent prayer come

and kneel before this altar and receive the Bread of Life; let us receive the answer to our persistent and faithful prayer. For our Lord + Jesus desires to give us the Holy Ghost so that our faith may be strengthened, and we may cling even more fervently to Him. He desires to show us His tender mercy and lovingkindness, for He has remembered our lowly state and visited us with His salvation. In the Name of our Lord + Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit after Sermon:

Almighty and Everlasting God, the Consolation of the sorrowful and the Strength of the weak, may the prayers of them that in any tribulation or distress cry unto Thee graciously come before Thee, so that in all their necessities they may mark and receive Thy manifold help and comfort; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

The Votum:

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

Soli Deo Gloria!