

Matthew 15:21-28

August 16, 2020

Jesus treats the woman in our text in a way that He never treated even His own disciples. He never ignored them, but He does ignore her. He never called them little dogs, but He does call this woman such a dog. Is He sexist, bigoted, or both? She is, after all, a Canaanite woman.

Yet, Jesus speaks to her of her faith in a way that He never spoke to His disciples. “*O woman,*” He says, “*great is your faith!*” To Simon Peter, in last Sunday’s Gospel, He said, “*O you of little faith.*” To all His disciples, after stilling a storm, He said, “*O you of little faith.*” And when His disciples asked why they could not drive a demon from a boy, He said, “*Because of your little faith.*”

So, we have here in our text twelve men being trained as apostles. Men who would go out and change the world. Men who would write Gospels and Epistles, who would suffer and die as martyrs. And we also have a woman of whom we never hear again. And just the opposite of what we would expect, this woman teaches Jesus’ disciples about faith, not the other way around.

How is it that she even has faith? She was not born with it. No one is. But she has it here in our text. “*Faith comes by hearing,*” Scripture says. The word of Christ, what He was teaching the people, at some point came to the ears of this woman and the Holy Spirit brought her to faith in Jesus – the Son of David, as she calls Him. The One promised from long ago. David’s Son and David’s Lord. The Christ.

No two people are exactly alike. And I suppose that no two faiths are exactly like. There is one Faith – the Christian Faith. But some have strong faith in Christ, others have faith that is weak. I would dare to say that the disciples in our text thought of themselves as having stronger faith than others, especially of the woman crying out after them. “Get rid of her!” they were telling Jesus. “She is a nuisance. Just give her what she wants so that she will go away!”

But Jesus refuses to comply with their wishes. He allows her to follow them, all the while crying out for mercy. We do not know how long she kept persisting in this, but it was long enough to thoroughly agitate the disciples. Little did they realize, however, that they were in the presence of greatness. The greatness of this woman’s faith.

Church members today are much like these disciples. When the topic turns to faith, all we ever hear is how strong their faith is. I have yet to hear a church member say that he has a faith that is weak.

Some years ago, I traveled to Sudan to teach in the Lutheran seminary there. But I left realizing that these humble, persecuted Christians taught me much more than I could ever teach them. I went there to teach them the Faith. But they taught me, like this woman taught the disciples, what faith really looks like.

Faith clings to Jesus no matter what. The more Jesus ignored this woman, the more she cried out to Him. And when He called her a dog, an unclean sinner, instead of becoming offended at Him, she agreed with Him. “*Yes, Lord...*” she said, “You are right.” Neither His actions nor His words could drive her away.

What about us – we who would say with the disciples that we have a strong faith. Do we cling to Jesus, to His Word, to His Sacraments, no matter what? When Jesus “ignores” us by refusing to grant that for which we pray, does His silence become a wedge between us and Him, or do we cling even more to Him as did this woman? And what do we do when words are spoken which are offensive? Do we react in anger, or do we, like this woman, agree, “Yes, Lord, I am a dog; an unclean sinner before God.” Maybe our faith is not what we think it is.

But Jesus is exactly who He needs to be for us. No matter where we are – strong faith, weak faith, or no faith, Jesus endured the silence of the cross for each and every one of us. His own Father in heaven ignored Him, even as His enemies insulted Him. Yet, Jesus clung to the cross for your sake no matter what He had to endure.

The disciples of Jesus, along with the woman, were all over the map with regard to their faith. And Jesus knew exactly how to care for each one of them. He knows also how to care for each one of us. If your faith is strong, like the woman, Jesus will surely test it, even by fire, to bring you even closer to Him. If your faith is weak, He will not put out this *smoldering candle*, but He will gently point you to His sufferings and death for you. He will remind you that you are baptized into Him; that you are precious to Him, and He will never let you go.

Jesus does not love you more or less depending upon your faith. Nor does He forgive you, showing mercy to you, only if you have a strong faith. He forgives all of you no matter who you are, no matter where your faith is at.

The woman in our text approached Jesus, but as she did, she placed a very necessary word between Jesus and herself: mercy. “*Have mercy on me,*” she said. This is faith. It asks of Jesus looking not to itself in any way, but only to Him. It asks with all boldness and confidence, not because it is so great, but because Jesus shows great mercy to sinners.

She who had a great faith was in the presence of something far greater – the mercy of God. And so are you. Each and every day Jesus deals with you always according to His great mercy. Amen.