

Theme: "Believers cling to the Word of God"

Text: Mathew 15:21-28

"Grace and peace to you from God our Father, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit who has brought us together". Amen

The Gospel of today speaks about the faith of a Canaanite woman. This woman was tested by God, she struggled with Him and, in the midst of disappointment and despite facing opposition at every turn; she refused to give up or give in. God the Holy Spirit has caused the account of this woman to be written for us, showing that the life of the believer is one of continued, on-going persistence in the life and death struggle as a child of God.

You and I are to recall and remember that nothing, not even death itself, is to keep us from calling upon the Lord and holding Him to His Word, even when He appears to be against us and when His answer is "No. The book of Genesis in ch. 32 tells about another struggle. This chapter tells us that Jacob wrestled with the angel of God and Jacob did not let the angel go until He got blessed by him. What chance did Jacob have against the Angel of the Lord? None. However Jacob wrestled with the angel until dawn.

The struggle was so hard that Jacob thought that he was fighting with God Himself. What Jacob did? He clung to the Word the Lord had said him earlier in verse 12 of the same chapter: "I will surely do you good, and make your offspring as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude." (Gen. 32:12)

In our text the Canaanite woman debates with Christ. She had trusted in the words that she heard about Jesus before. But everything seems against her. This woman did not belong to the people of Israel. The story begins when Jesus decides to leave the region of Israel and go to the pagan territory. The Lord arrives to the region of Tyre and Sidon, and there a woman comes to Him for help because her "daughter was severely oppressed by a demon."

The faith of this woman was born into her heart after hearing the good news about Jesus. She had not had any contact with Him before. But she strongly believed that Jesus could help her; otherwise, she would have not run after Jesus. She was driven by her faith. She shouts after Him. She did not stop talking until the Lord granted her petition. She did not belong to the Jewish race, but this did not stop her to seek the help of the Son of God. Surely we must recognize her courage to turn to Christ for relief, even though she was a pagan woman.

Jesus Christ reacts very differently than His fame says about Him. Jesus did not say a word. Probably she thought; "To others He helped. Why does He treat me in this way? The silence of Christ was certainly a blow to her faith. Think for a moment: She trusts in Jesus, and He rejects her so abruptly!

Despite of this, she still clung to what she heard about Jesus. Probably she thought: "This Jesus is a good man. He does not deny help to anyone." There is no doubt that faith comes through God's Word. Faith clings to this Word and does not let it go.

This is the doctrine that we teach and proclaim every Sunday at this church. Faith is solely the Work of God. On this Word we live and move and we do not allow anyone to remove it from us. In this Word we are born again, prepared and trained like creatures in the womb of our mothers. The Apostle Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 4:15: "for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the Gospel." The Christian church has a mission to raise and train children to eternal life. Therefore we should not despise the Word, because it contains everything for our salvation.

From this Word proceeds the Canaanite woman. She does not allow anything to separate her from this Word. She sees that Christ is silent, but despite of this she perseveres in the Word heard about Jesus before. The faith of the woman is exposed to a second test even harder than the first. The Apostles get involved and tell Jesus: "help her and get rid of her." Jesus did not heed to the plea of the apostles. Even though, Jesus Himself, had promised to His disciples, "Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you. (John 16:23).

But here the Lord rejects the Canaanite woman a second time and this against His own Words and promises. Then He says His reason: "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." v. 24. With this statement, Jesus bluntly explains why He did not want to help the woman. She does not belong to the house of Israel. It is as if Jesus had told the woman: "It is true, I promised to listen prayers, but this promise is not for you." This woman is rejected not only by Jesus silence but also by His responses. Jesus says that the woman has nothing to do with His Word. If the Canaanite woman has had a weak faith, she would have given up calling for Jesus' help. But she did not give up. She clung to what she had heard about Christ before He arrives to the area where she lives.

Our heavenly Father has revealed to us His Word of salvation. And this Word is divided in two kinds. The first Word is when He announces the forgiveness of our sins for Christ's sake. This is the good news of the Gospel. This message is the cornerstone upon which we based our faith. She clings to this Good News. Because of that she persevered on it. The second word of God He is giving to us through Moses. This is the Law. God uses it to test us; to see if we really want to stay firmly in His Word of Salvation.

The Canaanite woman was faithful to the first word of Christ. She put aside the second word of Christ telling her that Jesus was sent only to the house of Israel. She might have thought: "I must stay with the good news that I heard about Him. I should cling to the good news that says that He receives those who seek help from Him."

We should think in this way. "The Gospel and the Law are words of God, but the first word gives us eternal life. Ephesians 1:7 says, "In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace." Of course, we should honour His second word." The Law shows us how sinful we are, how incapable we are to satisfy God's demand, and the need of God to rescue us from our miserable situation.

The Canaanite woman clings to what people were saying about Jesus: that He is a merciful Lord. She might have said: "As much He says that He was not sent for me, what I care? I follow the first word as a child clings in the womb of his mother. The faith of this

woman does not vanish not even by Jesus rejection.

Then, Jesus Christ strikes her one more time. Jesus says to her: "It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." This simply means: whoever is not from the house of Israel, is a dog. There is no doubt, that these are harsh words of Jesus. However, the woman shows incredible courage and humbleness. She responds to Him, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." The woman is telling Jesus; just give me a crumb, Lord, just one crumb. The woman admits that she belongs to the dogs. She probably thought: "The people of Israel could get all the treasure that Christ brings, but something will come for us; the Gentiles."

The faith in the heart of this woman is really very strong. She clings to the first word, while at the same time she recognizes that everything that comes from the mouth of Christ, are God's words.

Jesus tells her: "O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire." The woman gets a victory for her unconditional adherence to the first word. Now she does not belong to the category of "dogs." No more harsh words from Christ. The truth is confirmed: The first word is saving word. The second word is given to test the strength of our faith.

My dear friends in Christ: The Canaanite woman admitted without any shame that she was a sinner, subject to death and hell. Through her answer she confessed to Christ her sinfulness. She was not only forgiven by Jesus but she also got that: "her daughter was healed from that very hour. And when she had come to her house, she found the demon gone out, and her daughter lying on the bed."

In this account from the Bible, we begin to understand why the Lord Jesus acted the way He did and said the things He said and was so silent at first. He truly does not desire to present Himself as a stern dictator or as not interested in helping anyone. Rather, He wanted the faith of the woman to become evident to her and to those around her as well as to us. A faithful dog's portion is all that she sought. However, what she received was a full portion from the table as a child of God and member of the Kingdom - a portion that our Lord desires all to have.

May our dear Lord God Almighty help us to learn this truth so well, that with our whole heart we firmly believe His Word and promises, and through Christ, with the Holy Spirit's help, are eternally saved. In Jesus' name. Amen.

"The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding keeps your hearts and minds through Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour". Amen