

"A Persistent Faith" - St. Matthew 15:21-28

The text for meditation for this Sunday is from the Gospel of Matthew 15:21-28, which I read before. Let us pray: **Dear Lord Jesus; let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, Oh Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.**" Amen

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Friends there is a word in the English language named: **Rehash**. I checked in a dictionary this word, and the meaning is: **to talk over or discuss again**.

So when two people have a conversation again and again about the same issue we can say that they are having a rehash conversation. Parent and their children usually have this kind of conversation. Parents say all the time "do not drink while driving, do not swear, clean up your room, put the garbage outside, do your homework, etc." In most of the cases children respond back to their parents and sometimes the conversation becomes sour and nasty.

Another example of rehash conversation is between the president of the USA Donald Trump and the ruler of North Korean Kim Jong-un. Now they are not talking face to face because the two nations do not have diplomatic relations since the end of the Korean War. The president of the USA says that a "Military solutions are now fully in place, locked and loaded, should North Korea act unwisely, hopefully Kim Jong Un will find another path!" Then the leader of North Korea says that "he is carefully examining" a plan to strike with missiles the US Pacific territory of Guam island." This is a war of words between the two leaders, and I hope that common sense come to both leaders and a nuclear war is avoided.

Friends, sadly, we live in a sinful world where conversations are not simply the exchange of pleasantries but are often loaded with tension and degenerate into a sparring match. We want to know who is smarter, more daring and ruthless. We want to hear quick witted remarks and applaud their delivery.

But what we do not want, is to be on the losing side of these sparring matches, we do not want to be the dim witted brunt of verbal jokes. We would all like to be sharp and witty. In our sinfulness, we would all like to deliver the final cutting stab of which there is no reply. We would all like to do it with our smart answers that cut to the quick but we do not.

Our sermon text for today describes just that kind of a conversation. One where there are witty plays on words, quick questions and sharp replies. And yet, as much as this is the kind of thing that makes up our everyday lives, is this the kind of conversation that should take place between two Christians? And more importantly, as we hear about it in Holy Scripture, is this the kind of conversation that we would expect from our Lord Jesus Christ?

"Am I hearing this correctly?" we might ask ourselves. "Is this the gentle Jesus I know?" Certainly, He heals the woman's child. He is the Great Physician so you would expect that. What we would perhaps not expect is that He should have to be persuaded into doing so through a quick sharp exchange of words. Nor would we expect that He should seemingly assert the superiority of one race of people over another; one group as God's children and the other as dogs.

And yet, probably one of the most loyal and lovable pets there is, is a dog. They stick to their master through thick and thin. They never desert, they are never fickle with their affection, and they never engage in emotional head games. Never has there been a truer friend, or a better pet than a dog. But, even with all those virtues to their account probably no one here would take it as a compliment to be called a "dog." But, that is exactly what Jesus referred to this woman, and her people. They were considered dogs. Not because of their loyalty and love of their master but because they were considered to be low and disgusting.

This little encounter of Jesus with the Canaanite woman was written in Holy Scripture for our benefit, and yet it can seem to be a little problematic. Jesus appears to be no better than His sinful disciples, or any better than us as we engage in cutting conversations with put downs and nasty remarks.

We need to examine this incident more carefully, and then we will find that these issues are soon resolved. For as Jesus looked on this woman, He did not see her as an interrupter as did the disciples, an unwelcome intruder of His time and energy. Rather, He saw her as a woman of great personal faith, and His conversation with her was designed, not to be nasty but, to test that faith. Instead of leaving us in doubt about the Lord's words and actions, the text can lead us to a better understanding of the nature of a persistent faith.

Persistent faith gives Christ joy. "Without faith it is impossible to please God"

says Heb. 11:6. This Scriptural truth is certainly an accurate one. And so, the converse is also true: Every time we make the difficult venture of faith, we bring joy to God. Just imagine the twinkle in the Lord's eyes as this encounter took place.

"It is not fair," Jesus says, "to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs" (Mat. 15:26). Although knowing that she, a Gentile woman, was as unclean in the eyes of a Jew as a prowling junk yard dog, she did not contradict what Jesus said. "Yes, Lord," she replied, "yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table" (v. 27). Her response is quick. It exhibits a spirit, a faith, that no doubt gave Jesus joy.

This woman was of great faith. A faith that was not going to falter at the first road block, at the first obstacle. This was a faith that was going to hold on through thick and thin, this was a persistent faith, a stubborn faith. And, persistent faith, by God's grace, breaks barriers.

Throughout this entire encounter, the woman's faith in the ability of Jesus to cure her daughter is the dominating factor. She looked to Christ as the Master and was happy with the crumbs, where as the children, that is the Jews, the chosen people, would throw the bread away and kill the Master.

The whole incident shows that her faith was strong and she endured the test. There was the rude impatience of the disciples, who regarded her as little more than a bothersome dog, and there was the seeming indifference of Jesus Himself. Still, her faith persisted, and that persistence paid off! The Lord is not hindered by human barriers and conventions but Christ can overcome any barrier, any obstacle, with His divine love. This woman had faith in Jesus; she believed Christ's power was great enough to surmount the obstacles of race, distance, disease, and demons. After Jesus saw such faith in the woman, He said, "Great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire." And, her daughter was healed instantly.

Friends, persistent faith is grounded only in the fact that God is a God of plenty. He can make promises and carry them out. He has unending resources to cure the sick, make right the wrong, forgive the trespasser, change hearts, calm the seas, raise the dead, and give everlasting life.

The persistent faith of the woman on behalf of her child shows a great confidence in the vastness of Christ's resources as the Son of God. Mere crumbs were all she asked for, but she trusted and believed that behind this Teacher with whom she talked was God's plenty.

The power of God can never be exhausted, for it has its foundation, not in our good intentions or the quality of our faith but, in Jesus Christ, whom the woman recognized as "Lord." The words of Christ to the woman were not words of displeasure or arrogance, they were not the sharp and cutting words of our nasty witty conversations that sometimes we have, and they were not the words of a put down, as it might appear at first glance. They brought to the surface a love, a loyalty, a persistent faith in the power of God.

The intent of our Lord was to challenge the woman's faith, and the depth of that faith was clearly demonstrated. And that, is perhaps why this little encounter of Jesus with the Canaanite woman was written in Holy Scripture in the first place; to teach us something, for our benefit even here today.

How does the Lord challenge our faith? In what ways are we given the opportunity to demonstrate the faith that God has blessed us with? Is it through a conversation? Perhaps it is there. Is it through the illness of a child? It could be there too. Whatever the circumstance may be, know for sure, that our faith is well placed and clearly demonstrated when we do not stumble and fall at the first road block, when we hold on through thick and thin, when we stand firm for the Lord, never denying the Master or rejecting His bread, and patiently look to Him for blessings.

Some will laugh at that. Some will mock it. Some will call you stubborn and unbending. Some will think of you as out dated and old fashioned. But, that is the constant, persistent faith that leads to our Christian goal, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting, in heaven with Jesus. And that is the kind of constant, persistent faithful love that our Lord has for us. He never denies us, He never forsakes us, He never runs away and leaves us.

Our Lord never plays jokes on us, or calls us anything other than His people, His beloved, His precious treasure, His little lamb cradled in His strong, gracious arms. Our Lord Jesus Christ has stuck with us even through the suffering and death of the cross, and He will continue to love us and stick with us now, right here, today. Not because we have been so good and faithful but because He has a persistent love for us. Amen.

May God bless you with the gift of joyous, courageous faith; faith which trusts that no matter where we are led, we stand firm on the sure and certain Rock of Him who died and rose for us and who is with us always, to the very end of the age. AMEN.