

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

The portion of Scripture before us today is found in the Gospel according to Saint Matthew the fifteenth chapter beginning at the twenty-first verse, and we read in Jesus' name:

Then Jesus went out from there and departed to the region of Tyre and Sidon. ²² And behold, a woman of Canaan came from that region and cried out to Him, saying, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David! My daughter is severely demon-possessed." ²³ But He answered her not a word. And His disciples came and urged Him, saying, "Send her away, for she cries out after us." ²⁴ But He answered and said, "I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." ²⁵ Then she came and worshiped Him, saying, "Lord, help me!" ²⁶ But He answered and said, "It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs." ²⁷ And she said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their masters' table." ²⁸ Then Jesus

answered and said to her, "O woman, great is your faith! Let it be to you as you desire." And her daughter was healed from that very hour.

Heavenly Father, these are Your words and therefore they are the truth. We pray, Lord, that You would increase our faith through them. Amen.

Dear Redeemed by the Blood of the Lamb,

In Genesis (32) we hear about Jacob's return to his brother Esau. Jacob had been away from his brother for nearly twenty (20) years and was finally returning to him. Of course, we remember that Jacob left because he 'tricked' his brother, which I don't think is the case, and he ran because his brother, Esau, wanted to kill him.

Twenty years later Jacob is returning and he is fearful. In fact, so fearful that he splits his camp into two and thinks to himself, "well if Esau attacks one at least I can save the other." Jacob was not planning for a warm reception from his brother... and in this time of trouble he prayed.

Jacob prayed, ***“O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, the Lord who said to me, ‘Return to your country and to your family, and I will deal well with you.’ I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies and of all the truth which You have shown Your servant...”*** He finishes his prayer with the following, ***“For You said, ‘I will surely treat you well, and make your descendants as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude.’”*** Not only was Jacob returning to his family, not only was he taking precautions himself, but Jacob was not making sure that he spoke to his God and, for lack of a better term, reminded God of the promises that He had made.

Just like Jacob, we too have and will experience many trials in our lives. Whether it is the loss of a loved one, the loss of a job, a spouse who leaves us, an illness, an injury... regardless of the trial, I pray that God is able to look down on each one of us and say, ***“Great is your faith.”***

The gospel account before us today is one that many people know and, potentially, remember from a couple of weeks ago as it was mentioned in connection with the blind man. This woman comes to Christ and begs Him for help and He ignores her. Yes, God ignores the cries of one of His faithful children.

Now, lest we think that God is some spiteful and angry man, we need to remember that everything God does for us is for our good. So, yes, every now and then God will ignore your pleas. As Luther says about this text, ***“And this was written in order, that we might be comforted and that it may be made manifest to us all how deeply God hides His grace from us, and that we should not judge Him according to our feeling and thinking about Him but in accordance with His word.”*** So even Luther knew that at times God hides His face from us and allows us to endure hardship and trial.

Remember the disciples in the boat and the great tempest came upon them. Yes, God was right there in the boat but still the storm came

and the disciples were tossed about. They were crying out and afraid... and Jesus was asleep.

Does your life ever feel like that? Do you ever feel like God is asleep and allowing horrible things to happen to you? God why must I suffer here from this illness? God why did you have to take my wife from this world? God why... and let's be honest, very often we are not asking these questions from a loving and trusting heart but from a heart that thinks God hates it. We ask questions like this because we fear that, maybe, God has forsaken us and that we are now without His protection. As Gerhard says, ***“So then, such thoughts frequently crop up in the hearts of anxious, doubting people, as if the gracious promises of God do not apply to them.”*** And truly they do crop up, so often we think that God has forsaken us or forgotten about us; yet, that is not the case.

Yes, God allows hardship into our life but it is meant to strengthen us and to grow our faith. Instead of taking God to task according to our feelings, maybe we should look at all of the

promises of God, in His word, just as Luther reminds us.

Remember that the disciples, though afraid and though tossed about, once God, once Jesus, answered them their faith was strengthened and they believed in Him all the more.

And so too the woman in our text. She comes to Jesus begging for help, begging Jesus the “Son of David,” God, for help and He does not answer this woman. So she is persistent in her pleas for help, and Jesus does finally answer her. Jesus says, ***“It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs.”*** Wow... how would you respond if God called you a dog? That had to smart just a bit and yet, the woman was undeterred. She trusted in Jesus Christ and knew that only He could help her.

Yes, this same Jesus Christ whom each and every one of us should rely on in the same manner. Jesus Christ, who came into this world to live a perfect life. Jesus Christ, who came into this world to die an innocent death. Jesus

Christ, who rose from the dead three days later. This same Jesus Christ, just as the woman had such great faith in Him, we too should have such great faith in Him.

And yet, we know that this faith is not something that we can produce in ourselves... nor could this woman. We know that, as Paul says, “***Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.***” This Canaanite woman knew Jesus to be her Savior, in the same way that we know Jesus Christ to be our Savior, through God’s word. God’s word tells us time and again about our Savior who has redeemed us from all sin, who has “set the captives free,” who has saved all mankind, who has lived and died to make atonement for all sin. This same Jesus, whom the Scriptures declare to us, is the one and only that the Canaanite woman could trust in, and He is the only one that we, too, can trust in.

We cannot trust in man for man will fail us; it is only in God that we can place our trust and it is only in God that our faith will cling. Our faith,

that God has given to us, will cling to Christ and His word.

Just as this woman had a great faith in coming to Jesus and begging Him for help. She knew that she was risking a lot: a woman, a Canaanite, a ‘Gentile,’ coming to Jesus Christ to ask, to beg, for help... and yet her faith would not be deterred. She knew Jesus, she knew of His miracles, she knew that He was the Savior and she trusted only in Him.

And though His responses seem harsh to her, all they do is allow her to show her faith all the more. Though the disciples wanted her pushed away, though the entire crowd would have been okay if she had just left, this woman would not leave Jesus... but held Him to His word.

Notice, that not once did Jesus say, “NO” to the woman and thus always left an opening for her. And she clung to Jesus and answered Him, “***Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their masters' table.***” Yes, Jesus, I know that now you have come to the lost children of Israel, but even those dogs,

like me, can still receive scraps from under Your table.

Just like Jacob trusted in God to return him safely to his family and to protect him from his brother Esau, so this woman also trusted in the word of God. She knew that the Savior was to come and do miracles and help His faithful children and she held Jesus to that word and she did not allow her feelings to get the best of her. As Martin Luther says, ***“Our heart hears and understands nothing but ‘NO,’ and yet it is not ‘No.’ Therefore, sweep your heart clean of such feelings and trust firmly in God’s Word and grasp from above or from the underneath the ‘No’ the deeply hidden ‘Yes’ and hold on to it as this woman did and keep a firm belief in God’s justice. Then you have won and caught Him with His own words.”***

Dear friends in Christ, as the disciples worried in the boat while the wind and the waves roared around them, once Jesus calmed the wind and the waves He had one comment for them, “Where is your faith?” However, to this woman in our text today she would not be deterred

from her understanding of God’s word and her faith in her Savior would not depart from her and to her Jesus said, ***“O woman, great is your faith! Let it be to you as you desire.”***

Yes friends, life will be full of trials for all of us. Some will experience more, some less. Some will seem to crush us from all sides, others will be minor annoyances. Regardless of the trials that God asks us to live through, we can always know that God is with us through them.

Yes He may be ‘ignoring’ our prayers and our pleas, just like Paul with his thorn in the flesh, but God is there and His Word is ever present. During your trials, do not lean on your feelings, nor on your own understanding, but lean fully on God and His Word. Unlike your feelings God’s Word does not change, it is constant, it is firm, it is strong, and that same word gives us faith and strengthens our faith.

Faith, which reaches out for the mercies and graces of Jesus Christ, especially the promise of salvation and life eternal with Him. Faith which

believes that Jesus lived, died, and rose again for each and every one of us. Faith, which is strengthened through His word and His sacraments.

Thanks be to God for giving us this faith.
Thanks be to God for continuing to strengthen that faith through His word and sacraments... but also through His trials which cause us to rely on and trust in Him all the more. And thanks be to God that He never leaves us completely and when our faith is strengthened in Him, He will look at each and every one of us and say, "Great is your faith."

Thanks be to God. Amen.