

14PENT08 (Pr. 15)

Matt. 15:10-28 "Faith Holds On to Jesus"

Chapter 15 of Matthew includes 3 stories. In story #1 we find Jesus in conflict with the "tradition of the elders". In story #2 Jesus is confronted by the Canaanite woman. In story #3 Jesus feeds the 4000.

Frederick Dale Brunner in his commentary on Matthew says that each of these stories have a theological lesson to teach.

The first story "establishes the source of teaching authority in the people of God, and this source is Scripture alone, above all traditions." As Luther would say....it is the "word alone" which is the source and norm of our faith and life.

The second story, about the Canaanite woman's faith and her persistence in getting Jesus to help her, teaches us the lesson that it is "faith alone" by which we have access to God's grace and power.

The third story in this chapter, the feeding of the 4000 reminds us of the grace of God which reaches out to all people. There are two miraculous feedings in Matthew. In chapter 14 Jesus feeds the 5000. This was near the Sea of Galilee and we can assume that the crowd was mostly Jews. But here in chapter 15 Jesus is in Gentile country, in the region of Tyre and Sidon, up on the Mediterranean coast in Phoenicia. Jesus shows no partiality and feeds the Gentiles. God's grace is for all. Luther would say we are saved by "grace alone" not by ethnic pedigree or social status.

As Lutherans we resonate with these concepts. WORD ALONE, GRACE ALONE, FAITH ALONE is the primary theology of our church. If you have your Bible with you today I invite you to open it to the front page and write there this formula of salvation. Write, "WORD ALONE, GRACE ALONE, FAITH ALONE."

Let's look at the story about the Canaanite woman to see how FAITH ALONE is lifted up. Jesus is in Gentile territory. A woman bursts onto the scene "crying out" at him. Other translations say she "shouted" at him. She disturbs the peace with her loud shouting. But note what she says, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me, my

daughter is tormented by a demon.” She calls Jesus both **Lord** and **Son of David**. Both titles of honor. Dr. Brunner says, “Her address **“Lord, Son of David”** soars up to heaven; her request goes down to hell: **“My daughter is tormented by a demon.”** She pitted Jesus against the powers of hell.” (F.D. Brunner, *Matthew, A Commentary*, Vol 2, p. 551).

But Jesus did not answer her. Why? Sometimes God is silent. It is one of the great mysteries of faith. We say that God answers our prayers and our cries for help...but often we experience the silence of God. It is then that faith holds on even in the silence. The disciples thought they knew what to do. They urged him to **“Send her away, for she keeps screaming after us.”** They wanted Jesus to get rid of this woman and her problem. They did not even use the title **“Lord”** when they talked to Jesus as the woman did. They did not even hear the problem that the woman was bringing to Jesus...it was her daughter that was sick. She wanted help for her daughter. Who would not have compassion for such a request? But the disciples just wanted her out of the way.

It is then we come to this difficult part of scripture. Jesus said, **“I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”** He is exclusive. This is offensive to us who live in a world which values inclusively. But to whom is Jesus really talking here? Dr. Brunner suggests that it is almost like Jesus is having a conversation with himself, muttering to himself in a way to help himself understand his own mission. Jesus was clear that his mission was to the House of Israel and that through Israel the nations would be blessed. But what about the Gentiles? Were they to be included also?

This pause in the encounter gave the woman a second chance to plead her case. She had a great need, her daughter was severely ill, and she had this one last chance and she was not going to let her chance slip away. So she **“Came up, knelt before him, saying, “Lord, help me.”** She is desperate and she believes Jesus is good even when it appears that he is not listening or is bent on steering a course around her. She says, **“Lord, help me.”** These three short words say it all. She thinks highly of Jesus and calls him “Lord” and she has a big problem, and she brings it to Jesus with the plea, **“Help me.”**

Once again we hear a difficult word from the lips of Jesus. It offends our politically correct culture. Jesus said to the woman, **“It is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs.”** The word “dogs” used here in Greek, is the word for house dog, the family pet. The woman saw a ray of hope. Jesus has not sent her away like the disciples wanted, he has not said “no” to her request, he seems to be struggling internally with his sense of mission and so she said, **“Yes Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master’s table.”** The family pet has moved into the house and is now at the table begging for some scrap of food. The Gentiles (whom the Jews called “dogs”) are now in the house, no longer out in the street and Jesus is about to bring them to the table. (Brunner, p. 553)

Faith holds on to Jesus for dear life. Faith holds on knowing that Jesus is good. Faith holds on even when God is silent. Faith holds on when the words of Jesus are unclear or even offensive to our ears. Faith holds on and holds on and holds on.

Then the text says, **“Then Jesus answered her, “Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish. And her daughter was healed instantly.”**

“The Canaanite woman has the best lines in this story, but Jesus has the last word: **“Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.”** Not “Canaanite woman” but simply “woman.” She will never be defined by national or racial or religious prejudice again. She is now a mother like any other who desperately seeks help for her child. And for this mother's sake, Jesus heals her daughter.” (From the wokingpreacher.org website for August 17, 2008, by Marilyn Salmon, Professor of N.T. at United Theological Seminary, St. Paul, MN.)

Jesus rewarded the woman with the trophy of describing her faith as “Great”. Dr. Brunner writes, **“Great faith is faith that overcomes the biggest discouragement of all: the discouragement that comes from Jesus’ Word. When Jesus seems against us, who can be for us? When Jesus seems to direct his Word against us, who can speak for us? But this woman does not believe his Word is against her...”** She listened not only to the words but to the speaker of the words and trusted in Him. Faith trusts that Jesus is good. Faith holds on to

Jesus for dear life, believing that Jesus is good even when his words are not clear or even not seemingly good. Faith holds on to Jesus.

Faith asks Jesus for help. We can bring people before God in prayer trusting that he will hear our prayer and help. It may take time, the silence of Jesus may intervene as it does in this story. But faith holds on, confident that Jesus is good and that He hears and helps.

As Xians we hold on to the **word alone** and the promises of God we find in His word. As Xians we trust in God's **grace alone** given freely in Jesus. As Xians we believe that it is by **faith alone** that we are made right with God.

Let us pray: Hold on to us good Lord, hold on to us. By the power of your **word** made flesh help us to cling to your promises in **faith**, that by your **grace** we may receive what we need and desire, the forgiveness of our sins and life everlasting, through Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN