

Jesus Healing the Demon Possessed Daughter

August 19 and 20, 2023

Third in a Series of Sermons, “Jesus the Miracle Worker”

The Faith of a Canaanite Woman

²¹And Jesus went away from there and withdrew to the district of Tyre and Sidon. ²²And behold, a Canaanite woman from that region came out and was crying, “Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is badly demon possessed.” ²³But he did not answer her a word. And his disciples came and begged him, saying, “Dismiss her, for she is yelling from behind us” ²⁴He answered, “I was not commissioned save only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” ²⁵But she came and knelt before him, saying, “Lord, be helping me.” ²⁶And he answered, “It is not right to take the children’s bread and throw it to the little pet dogs.” ²⁷She said, “Yes, Lord, yet even the little pet dogs eat the little crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.” ²⁸Then Jesus answered her, “O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire.” And her daughter was healed instantly.

Dear Friends,

Last Sunday, we learned from the stories of Jesus Walking on Water

- God’s will that we should be tested
- In the midst of storms, to keep on rowing and stay focused on Jesus
- To frame the difficult decisions in life in terms of win/win

Two Sundays ago, we learned from the story of Jesus Feeding the 5000

- To be grateful for our Savior’s compassion
- To be amazed at divine omnipotence

Today, we would learn, for the most part those same lessons

- As we see Jesus catechizing His disciples along the way and making sure the plan of divine salvation was being followed and communicated
- As we get a snapshot of a woman fixing her eyes on Jesus, refusing to be distracted, being commended for her faith.
- As we see Jesus display divine power over the devil and his demons.

Two questions I would ask and explore with you today -

- First, what do we learn about what it means to have a great faith?
- Secondly, what do we learn about Jesus, the Miracle Worker?

First, what do we learn about what it means to have a great faith?

That great faith is not too proud to beg.

I saw a Facebook meme that showed a big dog staring at his owner eating a sandwich. The bubble had the dog saying, “I see you’re eating a sandwich. I too enjoy sandwiches.”

Another showed a dog looking you in the eyes, “Every snack you make, every meal you make, every bite you take, I’ll be watching.”

As far as I can tell, there are only two kinds of dog owners. Those who reward their dogs with food and those who don’t. If you’re one of those people who tell your dogs to quit begging and then refuse to reward them, what’s the matter with you? Do you even have a heart inside?

There’s an old saying that “beggars can’t be choosers.” In other words, conventional wisdom is that beggars need to be content with whatever someone will give them.

The woman in today’s story fits well into that definition. Her daughter was demon possessed, and she was desperate for help. We know from other descriptions of demon possession in Scripture all kinds of terrible symptoms. Not being able to control themselves. Deaf. Evil spirits speaking through them. Totally different personalities. Wild mood swings. Superhuman strength. Scary behavior, unpredictable outbursts, suicidal tendencies.

Matthew gives us a picture of Jesus walking in silence, this woman crying out for the Lord, Son of David to show her mercy, the disciples urging Jesus to either grant her request or send her away, whatever will stop her from yelling from behind them.

In last Sunday’s sermon, Jesus rebuked Peter for having a little faith. In today’s Gospel, He commends a Gentile woman for showing a great faith. A faith that accepted the posture of a beggar and cried out with all of her heart and soul for help.

Luther once preached that “We are all mere beggars showing other beggars where to find bread.” And on his death bed, he is said to have scribbled on a piece of paper, “Wir sind bettler. Das ist wahr.” Translated into English, “We are beggars. This is true.”

The language of our liturgy is that we come again and again to our God as poor and miserable sinners confessing our transgressions, admitting our unworthiness, and beseeching our God for forgiveness. We don't just amble into the presence of God as if we belonged there on our own merits. We invoke the presence of the Triune God on the merits of Christ crucified, risen, ascended, sitting on the right hand of His father, and coming back again soon.

Secondly, we note that great faith refuses to be distracted.

When Matthew calls her a Canaanite woman, he is recalling the Old Testament account that the Jews had not completely exterminated them as God had commanded. This woman was a descendant of that old pagan race. Jesus was withdrawing into her country for the purpose of avoiding His enemies. But before He could do so, this woman took no chances. She came across the border and begged Him for mercy.

She refused to be distracted by his silence, but kept on yelling. She wouldn't take the hint when the disciples urged Jesus to dismiss her in one way or another. She didn't back down when Jesus explained that He had been commissioned as shepherd to save the lost sheep of Israel. She just kept on coming closer and closer, worshiping at his feet and crying out, calling Him Lord, pleading for Him to be helping her. She didn't take offense when Jesus pointed out that it would not be an excellent thing to take bread intended for beloved children and give it to the little pet dogs.

She accepted His metaphor and the status of a little pet dog begging for a few tiny crumbs. One commentator, Lenski, writes, "*Here is faith in all its lowly beauty....The greatness of this woman's faith lies not in its strength and its intensity which overcome obstacles set up by Jesus....The greatness lay in submissively accepting and in rightly understanding what Jesus said about his Messianic mission.*"

Secondly, what do we learn about Jesus, the Miracle Worker?

1. That He is the Master Teacher

A story is told about a farmer whose dog named Dolly had puppies. A neighbor boy came over and desperately wanted a puppy. The farmer explained that these puppies were very expensive, but when the boy reached in his pocket, pulled out less than a dollar in change, looked him in the eyes, and begged - the farmer

agreed. He could choose the best of the puppy. There were four frisky and beautiful puppies, and then the runt who could hardly walk, wasn't much to look at, and obviously had something wrong.

When the boy picked the runt, the farmer tried to discourage him and pointed out that the runt would never be able to run and play. To which the boy replied by pulling up the trousers on one of his own legs. Revealing a lame leg and a big steel brace. The boy said, "I can't run and play very well either. The puppy will need somebody who understands."

That day the boy was the teacher, and the farmer was the student who learned one of life's important lessons.

Every day, Jesus would be our Teacher, not just teaching us as individuals, but as groups of people.

- In today's Old Testament lesson, God was teaching through Isaiah that people of all races who would love His Name, be His servants, and hold fast to His covenant would be welcome in His Kingdom.
- In today's Epistle Lesson, God was teaching through Paul that the fact that so many Jews rejected Jesus as Messiah had opened up the door for the Gentiles to be attracted to Christ as Redeemer, Savior, Messiah.

2. *That He is the Compassionate Healer*

Two weeks ago, we saw Jesus having compassion on the crowds who were like sheep without a shepherd and taking the time to heal their sick, and feed them in amazing fashion.

Last week, we saw Jesus having compassion on his disciples who were rowing against the wind and getting nowhere by showing up in the nick of time and calming the storm faster than the disciples could blink an eye.

Today we see Jesus as the Gentle Healer. Of course, he cares about this girl whose mother would go to the ends of the earth on behalf of her daughter. Of course, He cares about those of us traveling through heart disease, loss of memory, and bad knees. Of course He cares about those of us recovering from surgery or anticipating a variety of costly procedures. Of course He cares about those of us regretting the sins of our past or worrying about what could go wrong in the near future. Of course He cares for those of us who are weary or burdened or stressed out or bored or confused or overwhelmed or all of the above.

He is the compassionate healer, and that's why He came down from heaven above to live among us in the flesh for a time. That's why He lived the perfect life none of us can get close to living. That's why He restored sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, and the ability to walk to the lame. That's why he cleansed the lepers, drove out demons, and cured the epileptic. That's why He set His eyes on Jerusalem and would not be distracted until He had suffered all that He was appointed to suffer and was crucified until He was dead and buried. That's why He rose up again in victorious fashion / that's why He ascended into heaven in amazing glory / that's why He and His Father sent out their Spirit to be our Comforter, our Counselor, our Teacher, and our Encourager / that's why He assures us again and again, "I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

3. That He is the Ultimate Missionary

In today's story, we find Jesus going across barriers. This is the hallmark of His ministry. In a world so filled with exclusion, Jesus gathers. He includes. His ministry is always uniting, calling together, bringing back into unity and harmony with His Father and His children.

Three barriers Jesus crossed with this miracle.

First, she was a woman. In Jesus' day, boys were taught to thank god each morning in prayer that they were not girls. The disciples wanted Jesus to dismiss her so they could get on with their day. And yet Jesus took time to help her.

Secondly, she was a Gentile. That marked her as an outsider. Jews had no religious traffic with Gentiles, and the boundaries of exclusion were tightly drawn. It was against Jewish law and tradition to do what Jesus did.

Third, she was a human being with a need. In this case, it was her daughter who was out of control, perhaps out of her mind, an embarrassment to society.

To this very day, although good and decent people are willing to help and befriend those in need, we often draw the line when the cost of helping is high. Or when the timing seems off.

(Story of Eleanor, a single lady with all kinds of needs back in the 80's. Congregational members and this pastor helped her with the basic needs of life, and I must have said one or more times, "Call me, Eleanor, if you need help." It was a Friday afternoon / I was trying to finish up a sermon / she called and needed help right away / I asked what was wrong / she didn't have time to talk

and begged me to come now / I drove the 5 or ten miles to her trailer out in the country / Her problem was simple. Her toilet was plugged and overflowing.)

Our Mission Statement at Faith is this: A Heart From God / A Heart for Others. Our commission is to love as we have been loved, forgive as we have been forgiven, serve others in response to Christ serving us first with gifts of grace.

- On our bad days, we will be too proud to beg, too full of ourselves to learn the lessons God is trying to teach us, and too busy to help those who truly need our help.
- On our good days, we will be confessing our faults to God and to one another / the grace of God will be sweeping over our souls and ruling in our hearts.
- On our really good days, we will be looking for those neighbors whose toilets need to be unplugged, whose hedges need to be trimmed, who need a ride to the doctor or a listening ear or a word of encouragement, and the list goes on.
- Every day, we will be the beloved, the precious, and the redeemed children of our Heavenly Father, In Jesus' Name. Amen.