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Christ the King & Immanuel Lutheran Churches – Cody & Powell, WY

Reminiscere (Second Sunday in Lent)

February 25, 2024

Text: Matthew 15:21–28

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

A bedrock conviction and steadfast hope of all Christian believers is that God hears and answers prayer. In Psalm 65:1-2, King David prayed, “Praise is due to you, O God, in Zion ... O you who hear prayer, to you shall all flesh come.” The Lord Jesus commanded His disciples to pray. In Luke 11, the Lord Jesus gave the Lord’s Prayer and then, a few verses later, gave this promise, “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.” (vs. 7-8). By the promise of Christ Jesus and by the grace of the Holy Spirit, our prayers will be heard and answered.

But then there are those times in which it seems God is not answering our prayers and is apparently ignoring them. This too we find in the Bible. Both King David and the psalmist Asaph pleaded to God to not remain silent. David’s prayer is found in Psalm 28:1, “To you, O LORD, I call; my rock, be not deaf to me, lest, if you be silent to me, I become like those who go down to the pit.” Asaph’s prayer is recorded in Psalm 83:1, “O God, do not keep silence; do not hold your peace or be still, O God!” In all these situations, the psalmists pray to God because they are surrounded by evil circumstances and slanderous men. They need God, desperately. And yet, God remains silent. Such is the affliction and trial Christians often face.

I want to say this clearly for all to understand. God’s silence – or maybe better, God’s apparent silence – to our prayers does not mean He doesn’t love us. Nor does it mean we are somehow defective, inferior Christians who just simply lack the right kind of faith to move mountains (Matt. 17:20) or to heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, and cast out demons (Matt. 10:8). Something else is happening during these times.

The understand better these times of silence and how God uses them, let us look briefly at today's Gospel reading from Matthew 15. The details and setting are straightforward. While preaching the Gospel of the kingdom in the northern, Gentile regions of Tyre and Sidon, a Canaanite woman from the area pleaded to Jesus to deliver her daughter from demonic oppression.

Two remarkable things stand out as this woman prays to Jesus. She calls Jesus: 1) Lord and 2) Son of David. She believes Jesus to be both her God and her Savior. She calls Him Lord and asks Him to do what only God can do, cast out a demon from her daughter. Also, she believes Jesus is her Savior. The title, "Son of David" is a Messianic title belonging only to the Savior promised in the Old Testament Scriptures. The Canaanite woman is a Christian for she believes Jesus is Lord and Savior. Going to Jesus in prayer for her daughter is the act of a loving mother and a true believer.

But the Lord Jesus responds with silence. Vs. 23, "But he did not answer her a word." Cold silence. I must hasten to add our Lord's silence ought not to be interpreted as indifference or worse, rejection. The Bible doesn't tell us her thoughts or emotional response to Jesus' silence except that in the very next verse, the disciples asked Jesus to "Send her away, for she is crying out after us" (vs. 23). In other words, she kept praying to Jesus. So much so, the disciples want Jesus to do something if for no other reason than to calm the situation down. "Send her away" can either mean they want Jesus to grant her request so she'll go away. Or, it could mean just dismiss her; tell her to go. Either way, the nuisance and public spectacle she's making will stop.

Jesus responds with what appears to be a rejection. "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (vs. 24). The Son of David is a Jewish Savior promised in the Jewish Scriptures. The woman and her daughter were Canaanites, the ancient foe of the Jewish people. I didn't come for you or your daughter. It's an outright "no." And to pour salt into the wound, Jesus says this to the disciples directly and not to her. She hears it only indirectly.

She and her daughter are tormented by the real, spiritual oppression of a demon while at the same time, they are surrounded by people who do not seem to care. Remember David's prayer, "If you remain silent, I will become like those who go down to the pit." Without you Jesus, the darkness of death and Satanic oppression will overcome us. But the Lord remains silent.

The woman falls to Jesus' feet and prays a simple prayer, "Lord, help me" (vs. 25). This is a prayer we ought to pray regularly and frequently. Another similar prayer from the psalter is Psalm 119:94, "I am yours; save me." Part of the struggle in prayer is the conviction we belong to God by virtue of His claim made upon us in our baptism, in our Lord's death and resurrection for the sins of the world, and by the presence of the Holy Spirit dwelling in our heart. These truths are established upon the promise of God's Word. But those promises confront the afflictions of life in this sinful world. Like that of a demon oppressed daughter, or a conscience burdened by sin, or a devastating turn in financial stability or physical health, and so forth. To all such things, Christians simply prays, "I am yours, save me. Lord, help me."

Jesus finally speaks to the woman. "It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs" (vs. 26). This may be the hardest part of her struggle yet. For Jesus says directly to her that she is outside the covenant of the Old Testament and therefore not entitled to the blessings of God's children.

In my judgment, this is the most amazing part of this whole situation. The woman does not argue with Jesus. She does not express any feelings of being insulted, demeaned, or slighted in the least. Quite the opposite! She says, "Yes, Lord." Stop there. Yes, Lord. I and my daughter don't deserve anything. To translate this into the words of our liturgy, we say, "I, a poor, miserable sinner ... have offended you and justly deserved Your temporal and eternal punishment" (LSB 184). Yes, Lord. We deserve punishment in time and in eternity. We do not bring rights, merits, and self-worthiness. We come only with our need in response to God's Word. "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." (vs. 27). This unworthy dog gladly and contentedly will take the crumbs of Your blessed

table knowing those meager morsels are more than enough for me and my daughter. Yes, Jesus. I will gladly be Your dog under Your table.

Do you see what this woman has done?! She has taken Jesus at His word and said, “Yes! My daughter and I belong to you! That’s all I want; that’s all I need. Yes, Lord.” Jesus answered, “O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire” (vs. 28).

I said earlier that “something else is going on” with Jesus’ apparent silence. God’s promise to hear and answer our prayer is unshakeable and sure. We must also know that Jesus will answer our prayers for our good to strengthen our faith in Him and to draw us closer to Himself. Apparent silence, an outright “no” or “yes” to prayer always serves those ultimate and glorious ends. To know and love God more deeply. For you were created and redeemed to know and experience the fullness of fellowship with God.

The apostle Peter encouraged the suffering, persecuted Christians of his day with these words from I Peter 1:6–7:

⁶In this (salvation) you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, ⁷so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

What’s going on when God is apparently silent or says no? The authenticity of your precious, holy faith is being revealed through fiery trials. The result is praise, glory, and honor for you and God at the coming of Jesus on the Last Day. To this, we Christians say a hearty, “Yes, Lord. I am yours.”

✠ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. ✠ Amen.

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.