

Matthew 15:21-28

Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon." But he did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, "Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us." He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me." He answered, "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." Then Jesus answered her, "Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish." And her daughter was healed instantly.

Acts of Faith in Times of Trouble - August 16, 2020

Matthew 15:21-28

In the old testament scripture today, we have part of the story of Joseph. But in order to understand this fragment we need a little context. Most people know the story of Joseph. He was an interpreter of dreams and his many-colored coat which signified that Joseph was loved by his father Abraham over and above his older brothers. As Bob so eloquently said when we were discussing this scripture a few weeks ago, Joseph was a spoiled brat. Things did not go well for Joseph. He was sold into slavery in Egypt. We know from other texts that he was bound in chains and fetters that marred his skin. He was imprisoned, where he faithfully used his gifts of prophecy to raise to a position of great power and wealth. He lived to see the fulfillment of his prophetic dream of his older brothers bowing before him. Through trickery and conniving he was able to finally see that his brothers loved his father Abraham and showed concern for his youngest brother Benjamin. This demonstration of unity of his family finally broke Joseph's well-developed Egyptian façade. It broke down the barriers between the powerful nation of Egypt and a nomadic tribe that would one day become the nation of Israel. The unity of the family brought blessings to the entire nation of God's chosen through Joseph's faithful actions in hard times.

The Gospel lesson for today also teaches us about the artificial divisions between people. In this scripture Jesus seems to ignore the pleas for help of a Canaanite woman. The Canaanites were the people that God had told Joshua to eradicate completely from the earth. What on earth would a Canaanite woman ask of the Son of God? Jesus, the perfect teacher, used this moment to teach his disciples about unity and the necessity of faith. Jesus seemed to ignore the woman. His disciples wanted to send the annoying woman away, but she would not have it. She struggled to the feet of Jesus pleading for the Son of God to heal her daughter. Only to be met with Jesus calling her a dog. A very grave insult in this culture. Yet she persisted. She, with great humility demonstrated great faith in Jesus recognizing him as the Messiah. Asking for just a crumb, just a small act of kindness, not for herself, but for her daughter. This demonstration of great faith was so strong that it allowed Jesus to show that all people can receive the blessings of God. That the barriers that divide people can be torn down by faith.

I don't think Jesus called her a dog to insult her. He was talking to his disciples, making it clear that there were these barriers are meaningless in the presence of faith. He was teaching them lessons we are still struggling with today. The divisions of race, gender or orientation, or of nationality easily used to stir hatred and fear that seem to spread like wildfire. These artificial barriers are so easily

manipulated that even the most ignorant in our human family can use them to cause great harm. Jesus was showing that we are all able to receive the blessings of God through acts of faith in hard times.

Isn't that what the psalm is telling us today? How good and pleasant it is when we live in unity. It is like oil poured on the head of Arron. But not a sprinkle but poured abundantly so that it flows over the head, down the beard and even the robe. Great amounts of blessing flowing on the faithful. Arron, the older brother of Moses, the high priest of Israel, represents the faithful of Israel. Now it might not seem like a blessing to have someone pour oil on your head. But oil was not just used to anoint the priests. It was used to cleanse the body, to heal the body, and to refresh the soul. Think about this, you spend a few days outside on the beach. The sun and wind have chapped and burned your skin. You are covered with salt from the evaporated sweat and the dust of the sand, your lips are cracked and chapped. Then you reach the comfort of home rinse off and a loved one pours lotion or aloe over all your damaged skin. Bringing great relief. That is what we are talking about here.

Brothers and sisters, we must remember faith is necessary in all times. God can give us opportunities even in the hardest of times to demonstrate faith. I'll end with a short story.

Sam Grice is a bear of a man. A gentle giant and friend of mine from Texas. This was during a very severe three-year drought and his cattle tank had been dry for months. In NJ terms a tank is small pond in his pasture for the cattle. I was talking to him one morning at a men's breakfast, and he got up to leave. He had to go out to the ranch and dig out his tank. Everyone chuckled a bit. But this man of faith knew that even in the hardest of times he was given opportunity to prepare for the future. He could now use his D6 tractor to dig the tank out much deeper so that when the rains did come, he had more water for his herd.

Brothers and sisters, let's look for opportunities during these hard times to move forward in faith, knowing for certain that God is with us. Find ways to live in unity with all of God's children, therefore inviting that precious oil of blessing to flow over all of God's children bringing us healing, cleansing our sins away, and refreshing our souls.