

Matthew 15:21-28

Pentecost 13, Supplement Series September 3, 2017

Theme: Lord, have mercy
I. You are the promised Savior
II. You are my God

INJ This fall we will be ramping up our awareness of Reformation 500. It has been 500 years since Martin Luther posted the 95 Theses and the Lutheran Reformation began. There will be special worship services and the new Luther movie, and all kinds of publicity, I am sure. At the center of the Reformation are several phrases for focus. The three that get the most attention are that we are saved by “Grace Alone,” through “Faith Alone,” by “Scripture Alone.”

Today we have opportunity to talk about Faith Alone. Jesus said that the Gentile woman had “great faith.” I want you to think about what makes faith great. How do you get great faith? How do you know if your faith is great, or if it is just medium or small?

I want to stop you right away, though, because the ways we usually think about faith confuse things terribly. When we talk about faith, we often consider it a personal thing. “My faith is something private. It is hidden and inside and no one but me can know it.” “My faith is even something I put together and it can be unique to me and different from yours.” Faith, if we talk about it that way, is unstable and wishy washy and worthless.

The Bible doesn’t talk about faith in that way. When the Bible talks about faith, it says faith is certain and confident and persistent and observable and active. So let’s explore a great faith as we come to Jesus with this woman in our lesson. Her cry is ours, “Lord, have mercy.” In faith we cry out because Jesus is the promised Savior and because he is my God.

Jesus and the disciples were up north at this time. They were out of the country and a foreigner started following them. Her problem, they came to understand, was that a demon was severely tormenting her daughter. That’s not a little problem, is it? Mom came to Jesus because she trusted that he could help. She found him for all the right reasons and had great faith in him. But before we discuss all the right reasons, let’s identify some wrong reasons – the ones we often wrestle with when we come to Jesus in faith.

She had a great need. Sometimes we come to Jesus with great needs, and we figure he should help us because our need is so great. “Look at how miserable I am!” “This is a big one, Jesus. You handle it!” Do we

think Jesus should be moved by how pitiful we are, and that is why he helps? Is faith that Jesus will help because my need is great? No. In fact, Jesus did not answer a word to her cry. If we trust Jesus to help us because we need him to, then perhaps “not a word” is our answer.

The woman persisted. That is a good thing! She did not give up when she was tested. She was so loud and disruptive that the disciples urged Jesus to send her away. They were up north to get away from the press of the crowds. Get rid of her!

While her continual crying out was good, sometimes we turn it into something less so. Why does Jesus answer our prayer for mercy? Because we are so persistent? Because we spent hours praying over it? Because we got some friends and now 42 of us are praying about it? Can we bother God so much that he finally gives in and does what we want? No. Jesus still didn’t speak to this desperate woman. He told his disciples that he was sent to the lost sheep of Israel. In other words, he had a mission, and her crying out to him didn’t alter the plan.

Don’t misunderstand. Persistence is good – but don’t trust your persistence. A great faith does not find strength in what we do, or what we have. Not our great need; or our great attempt; not even the great odds that must be overcome – make faith great. Christian faith does not rely on anything we do. A great faith has an object that is unshakeable. The Canaanite woman knelt before Jesus. She worshiped him as the promised Savior. Her cry is ours: “Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David.”

Notice the title she uses to call out to him. Not Jesus, the human person. Not anonymous prophet or man of God. But Lord, Son of David. She confessed her trust in God’s promised Savior. The one who would be a descendant of great King David. Who was from that special people of Israel and who would take away the sins of the world. God had promised to send him. Now he was here, and she was able to come to him with her request. She trusted that he would help – not because of her great need. Not because of her but because of who he is. He is the Promised one who helps!

This woman’s great faith asked for mercy from God. Is it interesting that she did not specifically ask for her daughter’s healing? She presented the need, but she did not dictate the resolution. She asked for mercy. Don’t treat me as my sins deserve. Don’t reject me because I am rebellious and deserve worse than I have. Don’t condemn me for my guilt. Lord have mercy. Show me kindness. Give me relief. Not because I deserve it, but because you show it. You are the promised Savior. Have mercy on me.

I am sure she hoped for her daughter’s healing, but Jesus could do differently. Maybe she would have respite for a short time. Or a lessening

of the symptoms. Or the strength to handle a situation that was weighty. Perhaps another person could share the burden or something she could never imagine would help. The woman didn't demand, but she trusted – whatever the Son of David would do, that was good.

Your faith is like hers when it is confident in God's promises. You know who it is you rely on. Jesus is God's promised Savior. This is God himself in the flesh. This is the one who stood in your place to be pure and holy every second. This is the Lamb of God who suffered and died to pay for your sins. This is the one who rose from the dead and who proclaims your forgiveness. This is the one who will return to take you to be with him forever in heaven. "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David."

Faith is great because of the one it trusts. Your God is able to answer every one of your needs. He has had mercy on you, and he will continue to have mercy on you. That is what he has promised. You trust him – even though you don't know what he will do or how he will unfold the events of your life. How he does it isn't the important thing to faith. That he will – a great faith has no reservation.

We have the words in our liturgy. When we confess our sins and hear the words of forgiveness we sing "Lord, have mercy on us. Christ, have mercy on us. Lord, have mercy on us." You know that he has already had mercy. Your confidence is that he will continue to show it to you. Even if you are weary and heavily burdened, you will not turn away from him, because he is your God. You are his dear child. Lord, have mercy.

We look at this account and we might wonder what Jesus was doing. Why did he torture this woman? First, he doesn't even speak to her. Then he tells her he isn't sent to Gentiles like her. He even calls her a dog! "It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." I think I would have been mad at Jesus! No, Jesus, I am not a dog. No, Jesus I won't take this kind of treatment. No, Jesus, I don't think so!

Did you notice how this Canaanite woman with a demon possessed daughter answered her Savior? "Yes, Lord." Yes! Yes, I am unworthy to ask or to receive anything from you. Yes, I am nothing and you are everything. Yes, Lord, you are right in all things. Yes, Lord, I deserve no mercy, no help, no answer, nothing. Yes, Lord.

Does she catch your attention because you are not that humble? Is her "Yes, Lord" surprising because you would tell God, "No!" Isn't it our tendency to hold back and rely on ourselves, just a little bit? Don't we want to direct God in how he should help us (not that way!), and then take credit for however we worked things out?

"Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David." I can't fix my

situation. I can't make it better in any way. Yes, Lord, I am full of sin. Yes, Lord, I am at your mercy. Lord, do for me what I cannot do, but what I need more than anything. Forgive me. Have mercy. You are my God.

Could you be disappointed in what your God does? No matter what it is, it is good. It is right. It is a blessing. Even crumbs that fall from the table are fantastic, right? Because a crumb of God's mercy means deliverance from sin and death and the Devil. A crumb means he is my God and I am his beloved child. A crumb, Lord. Yes.

Yes, because your divine power interceded for me. Yes, Lord, for you washed me clean in your blood shed on the cross. Yes, Lord, for you declare me righteous in your sight. Yes, you have prepared a place for me in heaven, and I will dwell with you forever. Yes, Lord, I fall down and worship you because you are my God.

How do I get a great faith like the woman in our lesson? It isn't a mystery. God tells us, "Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ." Faith is God's gift to us. He creates it and he sustains it by his gospel in word and sacrament. Great faith is great not because of its own believing, but great faith is great because of the object it trusts. I trust Jesus to have mercy on me. He is my God! He says that he will not leave me or forsake me. He says I am forgiven. He says I will rise from the dead. He says he is present miraculously in the bread and wine of Holy Communion. He says I have peace. He says it. Great faith is confident he will do it.

You have great faith. You do, because God gives it to you. He gives you confidence in his mercy. He gives you trust in his redemption. You rely on his forgiveness. You lean on him and not your own understanding. You accept his doing and you follow his leading in the word. You say, "Yes, Lord." I trust you because you are my Savior and my God.

Faith is a gift from God. Your faith is not yours, and mine is not mine – not in the sense that we get to do with it what we please. Our faith rests on Jesus' words. He gives us confidence and contentment and an amazing answer, that we are his beloved. This very hour you are forgiven!

Jesus healed the daughter of the Canaanite woman, but what if he hadn't done that? Faith is not about what will happen in the days of our lives. Not about healing or recovering or getting what we wanted and restoring balance to our family life. It is about the One whom we trust. He is our God, the promised Savior. We have forgiveness and heaven. We are focused on the One who has redeemed us by Grace Alone. Who reveals himself in Scripture Alone. Faith cannot live without those words. God has had mercy! We live by Faith Alone. You have great faith! SDG Amen.