

“Discouraged or Encouraged?”

Text: Matthew 15:21-28

The artist Rembrandt was the most popular painter of his day until he was about 35 years old. He had all of Holland, and virtually all of Europe clamoring for his work and applauding him. He painted anyone of distinction and he commanded any price that he asked. Van Dyke who was more elegant, easier for the general public to grasp and understand replaced him, and Rembrandt was rejected in favor of his more elegant successor.

A few years before his death, he was forced to sell all he has and lived the remaining years in poverty. An art critic wrote: “And yet, most of his finest paintings belong to these difficult years.” Rembrandt was finally rejected, but the rejection was not final. The rejection really brought on his true genius as an artist so that he was greater than before.

Our gospel lesson, one of the greatest stories of faith from all of Scripture, has to do with rejection, disappointment and discouragement. Out of it comes a great example of faith for us today. This woman had her faith tested, as we often do today. The true basis of our faith is not the immediate results of a situation, but rather the hope that is given to us through our Savior Jesus Christ. As we have difficulties, when events in our lives seem to be going opposite of what we desire, how will we respond?

DISCOURAGED OR ENCOURAGED?

I. Faith often faces obstacles

II. The “crumbs” of God’s grace are enough

I.

A.1. Jesus had taken time out from his work. He now is at a period of his ministry where his message is drawing criticism, especially from the Pharisees. This woman came out to meet Jesus because she was concerned about her daughter who was demon possessed. The woman probably had grown up as a pagan, but she knew of the teaching of Jesus and believed in him, as we shall see.

In times of illness, we know where to turn. It does become complicated with the advancements and technologies of today that causes us to place our faith in these things rather than our Savior. The great scientist, Michael Faraday did not consider this as a conflict. When he was asked about his speculations about life after death he said: "Speculations! I know nothing of speculations. I'm resting on certainties. I know that my Redeemer lives, and because he lives I will live also." We too have that certainty today as we face illness whether temporary or terminal.

2. The last verse of our text tells us: "And her daughter was healed instantly." After all that rejection, her case didn't look very promising. There are times today when medical healing seems impossible, yet it occurs. Healing at the hand of Jesus does not always mean better health, but can mean the certainty of eternal life that Faraday confessed on his deathbed. Regardless, we can believe in him who cured this young girl of her illness. This is true in any difficulty that we might face.

B.1. It can be a very dangerous notion to portray Christians as those who never have any problems. St. Peter wrote to early Christians: "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial that comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you." (I Peter 4:12)

The people who Peter addressed were undergoing great persecution and suffering. This woman was enduring this as well. This woman had become a child of God and had faith in Jesus as we do. Her faith was severely tested by the rejection of Jesus. We regularly pray for those who suffer from serious illness. We remember those who live in difficult plights and face economic challenges. We remember those who grieve over the loss of loved ones.

2. This woman was a gentile and was not one of those who Jesus had been sent to, at least that is what he told her. “It is not right to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs.” This is really quite a put down; instead, this lady used it as a great opportunity for her faith.

Martin Luther said that Jesus was not painted elsewhere in the gospels in such a harsh manner. This is really not so much a “no” as it is a “yes”. Many people of Jesus’ day put their faith in the miracles instead of placing faith in Jesus. Jesus wanted to know why the woman believed that he could do this for her daughter. She is saying, “I don’t deserve it, but whatever you decide will be enough.” That is the grace of God in Jesus Christ. This is all the woman needed. It is all that we need today as well.

II.

A.1. “Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat ‘the crumbs that fall from their master’s table.’” Certainly we wouldn’t feed our animals first and children later. Leftovers would be okay to give them. The family dog, and sometimes the cat make great vacuum cleaners!

Consider their day: the Israelites had the opportunity to hear and believe what Jesus said and did. They chose to reject it instead of believing. This woman had every reason to go away discouraged from the responses of Jesus. She did not, but instead she found encouragement in her faith. Whatever Jesus would send her way was sufficient for her.

Today we call it “entitlement”. It’s key word; to use computer terminology is “You deserve!” We hear it time and time again. It encourages us the spoils of our world regardless of our circumstances or condition. You know, we just have it coming. This woman knew she was undeserving, and we are too.

2. Jesus had an answer for her: “O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire.” I find it interesting that in the gospels, the people who seem least likely are the greatest examples of faith to us. The Centurion was another. He didn’t feel worthy for Jesus to come under his roof. He told Jesus: “Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof, but only say the word and my servant will be healed.” (Matthew 8:8) He was one who gave orders and took orders, how much more the word of Jesus?

B.1. I wonder how many people would have gone back the third time? How easily we can become discouraged. As we hear this story once again, there is great encouragement for us. God tests our faith not to drive us to despair, but rather to draw us closer to him. The gospel of several weeks ago recorded the testing of the disciples in the feeding of the 5,000. Last week it was Peter walking on the water. In Genesis, God tested the love, devotion and faith of Abraham when he was asked to sacrifice Isaac.

The woman had a test that she passed with flying colors. Is there discouragement in your life? Whatever it may be, remember this woman. There was no discouragement here, but the encouragement of faith.

2. It was this same grace of God that sent Jesus Christ into this world as our Savior. Our sins have been fully paid for in the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ. This is the message we proclaim and it is the message taught here in our school and Lutheran High.

This day as we install and rededicate our faculty it is a reminder to all of us of our faith. In a world of

discouragement we have that one message of hope that Jesus proclaimed to this woman that we can be encouraged in faith and life. Amen.