

Sermon: 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Lent

Text: Matthew 15:21-28 (v. 25)

Theme: Jesus' reactions to our prayers

Goal: To pray trusting in God's promises (God's Word), and not in our feelings

Dear Friends,

Introduction: International Women's Day was commemorated last week, on 8<sup>th</sup> March. Congratulations to all women! What if Pres. Zuma, in a public speech, would call all women as "dogs"? South Africa would collapse! – Or what if you were just "ignored" as a woman that day?

This was, on the one hand, the sad experience of the woman of our text; but, on the other hand, she also had a victorious experience of faith and prayer!

I want to recall the sermon of two weeks ago, when I preached on the blind beggar in Jericho. He approached Jesus calling Him as "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me". And I highlighted his faith in Jesus as the promised Messiah.

Here, we have a similar situation, when the woman cried out: "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me." She was a foreigner. She was not member of the people of God. Her people, the Canaanites, had deceived the Israelites several times with their false god Baal. But even so, she had faith in Jesus. Luther wrote: *She teaches us in a beautiful manner the true way and virtue of faith, namely, that it is a hearty trust in the grace and goodness of God as experienced and revealed through his Word. For St. Mark says "she heard some news about Jesus" (Mark. 7:25). What kind of news? Without doubt good news, and the good report that Christ was a pious man and cheerfully helped everybody. Such news about God is a true Gospel and a word of grace, out of which sprang the faith of this woman; for had she not believed, she would not have thus run after Christ. In like manner, we have*

*often heard how St. Paul in Rom 10:17 says that “faith comes by hearing the message”, that the Word must go in advance and be the beginning of our salvation. (Quoted by Phil Brandt, pp. 43,44).*

Notice this important detail in this story: She had heard some news about Jesus, and she trusted this news, this means, she trusted the Word she heard about Jesus. This is a very important point to understand the manner we should pray and the way Jesus listens to our prayers.

I – Jesus 1<sup>st</sup> reaction: Silence

In spite of her right prayer, “Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! Jesus did not answer a word.” - Have you ever experienced the silence of God? We begin to question ourselves: Are my prayers not right? Is it crazy what I am praying for? - The next question that raises in our heart: Is God not a merciful God? Why is He not answering my prayer? – And we easily give up.

*Luther wrote: Now, what does this poor woman do? She turns her eyes from all this unfriendly treatment of Christ; all this does not lead her astray, neither does she take it to heart, but she continues immediately and firmly to cling in her confidence to the good news she had heard and embraced concerning him, and never gives up. We must also do the same and learn firmly to cling to the Word, even though God appears different than his Word teaches... May God help us in time of need and of death to possess like courage and faith! (Quoted by Phil Brandt, pp. 46,47).*

II- Jesus 2<sup>nd</sup> reaction: Indifference

Jesus' second reaction is even worse than the first one. He seems to show indifference, to ignore that woman. When the disciples came to intercede for her, or, maybe, they were feeling bothered by her, and they asked: “Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us;” He declined their intercession saying: “I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.”

She was not member of the church and didn't have any right in God's blessings. I am sure the disciples agreed with this argument of Jesus. It took a long time for the disciples to understand that the Kingdom of God doesn't have boundaries.

They are not worthy... I am not worthy... How many times our heart is filled with these thoughts when a prayer is not answered immediately? Or even after some insistence? Luther: *Is not that a thunderbolt that dashes both heart and faith into a thousand pieces, when one feels that God's Word, upon which one trusts, was not spoken for him, but applies only to others? ...But what does the poor woman do? She does not give up, she clings to the Word!* (Quoted by Phil Brandt, p. 49).

## II – Jesus 3<sup>rd</sup> Reaction: Testing

What can we say about the third reaction of Jesus to the woman's prayer? "The woman came and knelt before him. Lord, help me! She said. Jesus replied, 'It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs.'" – The children were the people of Israel, the members of the church; the dogs were the foreigners, the non-members of the Jews. This was a common thought among the Jews. Luther: *She is not worthy to partake of the children's bread. ... she is condemned and an outcast person, who is not to be reckoned among God's chosen ones... Yet she does not despair, but agrees with his judgment and concedes she is a dog, and desires also no more than a dog is entitled to, namely, that she may eat the crumbs that fall from the table of the Lord. Is not that a masterly stroke as a reply? She catches Christ with his own words...* (Quoted by Phil Brandt, p. 50). "Yes, Lord, she said, but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table."

Faith and perseverance – these are the right words to describe how the woman passed the test. It was not only a test for the woman, but a test for the disciples as well. They had to learn that Jesus came to save all, not only His people.

## V – Jesus 5<sup>th</sup> reaction: answering to her prayer

When Jesus heard her answer, He said: “Woman, you have a great faith! Your request is granted! And her daughter was healed from that very hour.”

I asked some weeks ago, when I preached about Jesus calming the storm: *How big is our faith?* Peter was rebuked by Jesus: “You of little faith” (Matthew 8:26). The Centurion of Capernaum, a foreigner as well, was also praised by his faith. As a matter of fact, the only two people who were praised by Jesus by their faith were foreigners! (Matthew 8:1-13).

Luther: *Christ now completely opens His heart to her and yields to her will, so that she is now no dog, but even a child of Israel* (Quoted by Phil Brandt, p. 51).

Conclusion: Luther: *All this, however, is written for our comfort and instruction, that we may know how deeply God conceals his grace before our face, and that we may not estimate him according to our feelings and thinking, but strictly according to his Word... All this is spoken and written for the comfort of the distressed, the poor, the needy, the sinful, the despised, so that they may know in all times of need to whom to flee and where to seek comfort and help.* (Quoted by Phil Brandt, pp. 45, 51). *How shall we catch our Lord in his word? First of all, that means listening very closely to what he says and taking him at that word. It means kneeling at that rail and holding up that wafer and saying to God – “You promised! You promised that when I eat this my sins are forgiven. You promised that when I eat this, you come to me and make me one with you and all your people. You promised to dwell in my life and make it more like your life. You promised!” God loves it when we hold him to his promises... All I want is a crumb, a little piece of bread that has fallen from the master’s table. Just a crumb!* (Phil Brandt, pp. 56,58,59). **Amen.** Pastor Carlos Walter Winterle, Cape Town, 12 March 2017.