August 20, 2023 **BOLD MOVES**

The second part of our gospel passage for this Sunday St. Matthew 15: 21-28, speaks to us about a character, who Jesus described with four immortal words: “Great is your faith”. She was none other than a Canaanite woman who came from the country to the north of Palestine, a country hostile to the Jews. She was presumably married, she had at least one child; but that’s all we know about her. We don't know whether she was good or bad. We don’t know her name. All we know of her is that in this single encounter with Jesus, he spoke to her this four-word epitaph: “Great is your faith”. Only four words but they are enough to make her immortal.

We can trust these words as being true because the expert on faith Jesus Christ spoke of them as we read in Hebrews 12:2 Jesus, the "founder and perfecter of our faith". Jesus searched for faith, as a gem collector would go after jewels. He did not always find this faith in his disciples. On no occasion that we know did Jesus ever say of Peter, James, and John: Great is your faith. More often the words he spoke to them: You of little faith. On only one other occasion did Jesus praise a person for their faith. Interestingly Matthew records in his gospel we read in chapter 4: verses 12 through 16, we read about a Roman soldier stationed in Capernaum.

We regard this Canaanite woman with more than just an academic interest. She awakens in us a feeling of admiration, perhaps even envy, because she stands where most of us would like to stand. What a faithful Christian would like it said of him or her: Great is your faith. Think of what it would mean if an aspiring young artist had Picasso place his hand on his shoulder and say: You have a great talent. How wonderful it would be then to a believer in God, if Jesus would place his hand on our shoulder and say: You have a remarkable talent for faith. But how does one qualify for this praise? What does one have to do? To answer these questions let us take a closer look at the story of this Canaanite woman.

First, we can say of this Canaanite woman that she was willing to cross barriers. Her faith consisted mainly in the fact that she turned to Jesus for help. That was quite remarkable, however, when you remember that she was a Gentile, a Canaanite, and therefore a traditional enemy of the Jews. They had been despised for centuries. It was as real and deep an enmity as it exists today between the Arabs and the Jews.

On another note, one might wonder what indeed Jesus was doing in this foreign land. On no other occasion did he venture out of Palestine. Why now? The common explanation is that he knew that he was coming to the end of his earthly ministry, and he needed privacy to further train his disciples to carry on after his death. Jesus couldn't find this privacy in Palestine, so he went into Gentile territory where people didn't know him, or at least would pay no attention to him.

It was quite unlikely that a Canaanite would approach much less to consult with a Jewish Rabbi. The prejudices went too deep. This Canaanite woman was aware of this great gulf between the Jews and her people. Yet, here was a woman who had a desperate need because her daughter was seriously ill. She was therefore willing to cross over and turn to Jesus for help. That was her faith. Faith still consists of turning to Christ for help and barriers even today still must be crossed. There is the barrier of time, 2000 years to be precise, which, barring the sudden invention of a time machine, is a wide gulf. Jesus lived then and we live now. We think: It’s such a different ball game today. How can Jesus possibly help me? There is the barrier of culture.

A generation that travels faster than the speed of sound may well wonder how it can get help from a Palestine Jew who traveled on a donkey? Can Jesus even understand our problems? There is the barrier of pride. Am I willing to get beyond myself and admit that I cannot handle every situation that comes up in life? Are we able to cross the barrier that says, I don't need you Jesus? I am doing quite well by myself.

It seems clear that when this woman turned to Jesus Christ for help, she knew little of him. She first addressed him by simply saying, Sir. Then, unsure if she had been given the proper title, she added, Son of David. Undoubtedly, she had heard of the great powers of Jesus, and she was willing to put down her pride and cry out for help: "Have pity on me." But that was her faith and the extent of her understanding of who Jesus was and it was enough. There was no great exercise of intellect involved. She didn’t know any dogmas or creeds. Her faith simply existed in fact that she came to Jesus for help in a situation where she had exhausted all her own resources. If you like to know more about Jesus’ care and compassion. Please join us in our worship on Sunday at 11:00 AM.

Peace!

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