

St. Marks Episcopal Church – July 23, 2023

Pentecost 12 A – Track 2

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Gospel: Matthew 15:(10-20), 21-28

Faith

Faith – a relatively small word, but oh so important to the people of Christianity. I consider our entire religion could be based on this small word. We were not there 2000 years ago to see Jesus rise from the dead. We did not see the wounds in his hands, feet and side. We were not there to see him ascend into heaven. And yet, we believe all of those things, and more, happened. We have faith in the scriptures and other writings about Jesus, his life, his miracles, his death and his ascension into heaven to be by God's side.

In today's Gospel, we read about a woman, a Canaanite woman from the region of Tyre and Sidon. She calls out to Jesus to save her daughter from the demon that has possessed her. His disciples press him to send her away. He tells her that he was sent to save the lost sheep of the House of Israel. But she did not back off, she continued to press him because she knew he would be able to save her daughter. She had faith that Jesus could help her, help her daughter. When Jesus realized her faith was real, that her faith in him was great, he granted her wish and her daughter was healed instantly.

I could not find anything during my research for this sermon to tell me why she had such outstanding faith that Jesus could save her daughter. He was far from his normal area. I can only presume that his fame preceded him and she had heard about the other miracles he had performed and the other people he had saved. I got the impression that it was not normal for a Canaanite to ask a Jew for assistance and not normal to have that request granted. She must have had great faith that he could and would help her daughter.

But, it is easy to lose faith. Just look at Peter in the Gospel last week. He had faith in Jesus when he started to walk on the water to Jesus. But, part way there the wind blew and the seas rose up and he started to lose faith. When this happened, he started to sink into the water and he called to Jesus to save him. It was just a momentary lapse, but the result could have been catastrophic. Fortunately, he called out to Jesus to save him, he had enough faith to expect Jesus would be able to do so, and in fact, Jesus did save him.

You may remember from prior readings that bad things happen to good people. Hurricanes, floods, tornadoes, raging fires. All of these things can happen to and harm good people. People of faith. When these things happen it is understandable how someone might lose faith. But, this is when we need God the most. We need him by our side, holding us up. It is

when we need faith the most. We need faith that God will continue to support us and help us get through the terrible things that might be happening to us.

I read a story about a minister who lost his wife in a terrible accident. He lost his faith and became angry with God. He ripped off his collar and refused to have anything more to do with the church. When he thought of God, he saw the face of an angry, ugly being. It wasn't until a little girl came into his life and asked for his help in seeing God, that he was again able to see the kind and loving face that is truly God. That is the God we need to remember and cling to in times of pain and hurt.

I am reminded of a poem, "Footprints in the Sand", that I am sure many of you have seen. It is about a person that is walking along the beach and you see two sets of footprints dwindling down to one set at the most trying times in this person's life. He asks God why he was left alone at his most trying times and God replies that he was not alone, that that was when God was carrying him.

God is with us at all times, especially when we are at our lowest. We just need to recognize and reach out to Him.

I found this prayer for faith that I think is helpful and meaningful.

Dear God, some days are truly harder than others. I continue to pray to You day by day, but sometimes, it feels like these efforts no longer suffice. Sometimes I feel so alone, and in this solitude, my strength and faith waver. Please grant me strength, oh Lord, to ride turbulent waters that test my faith. Help me to remain steadfast even in times of loneliness. I pray that You will make Your presence known because I know even on days when I may not feel You, I know You are always everywhere around me. You are my one true God, and it is only in Your loving embrace that I find safety in dark times.

Amen.