

Sermon Transcript for Second Sunday in Lent, Reminiscere, February 28, 2021

Grace, mercy and peace to you from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Now this is the second time that we've had the reading with Jacob wrestling with God. The last was on Wednesday for our midweek service and now we have it again today. So I'm not going to spend a whole lot of time on it except to say this. This is Jacob wrestling with God, it is not that he could actually prevail against God but instead he finally held on to God for his hope and his strength. Before this, his name was Jacob, The Deceiver, is what his name meant. And he always did things his own way. He tricked his brother twice out of his birthright and his blessing and he tricked Laban and even though Laban tricked him initially, and all of this... And so now he's returning home and he's just really wondering, what's going to happen. Are all of his tricks and all of his deception going to come back and bite him? Or is he going to find peace? And so he sends his family away because he's afraid that they might get destroyed or stolen or taken away by enemies, his brother mainly. And he's alone, wrestling with God. And you can almost see this as Jesus wrestling in prayer. Wrestling with God is a great synonym for going to the Lord in prayer, when you are in your last hope, when you have nothing left, when there is no one else that can answer you, to cry out to the Lord, to wrestle with Him and to hold fast to Him. And that's really what Jacob was doing, he was holding fast to the Lord because only the Lord could help him at this point.

And this is good, the story that we have then of this woman, this Canaanite woman. So, she was not a Jew. She was not part of the family of God, the chosen people of Israel. She was a Gentile. Now, maybe she had an understanding of who the Word is. And we do think that she does because she comes as she calls to Jesus and says, "Have mercy on me, oh Lord, son of David." So, she very clearly has heard about Jesus in some way, shape or form. Maybe she's read the Scriptures, been part of a synagogue or something. Maybe she's heard it just from other people proclaiming this man who claims to be the Messiah or son of David, son of man. We're not entirely certain how much she knows and understands of who Jesus is, but she does know this, there's only one person in the entire universe that can help her. And that is this man, "Oh Lord, son of David have mercy on me." Now we know that the only one that can truly have mercy in the ultimate sense is our Lord and God. He is the only one that can forgive. He is the only one that can heal. And so she goes to the right source, looking for healing for her daughter. Now, Jesus sounds a little crass and callous with her. And he says, "Look, I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." Now, you might think that that's pretty harsh but she doesn't seem to think so. She accepts this idea and she says, "Still, Lord help me." In other words, she's not going to be deterred just because Jesus doesn't seem to be giving her the answer she wants. She still trusts that He is the only one that can give her a good answer and give her a way through this and so she persists, "Lord have mercy." Now, then finally Jesus even pushes her a little bit further and says, "It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." In essence, He's calling her a dog. He's saying to her, "You are not part of the chosen people of God. You have not been brought into the covenant through the normal means. Why in the world should I take my time and energy, which is for the people of God and give some to you?" It's really a testing of her faith and think about it, how would we react if God told us, "You're a Gentile, you don't deserve any of this grace and mercy of God, why should I give you anything?" What would our response be? I think some of us might get our hackles up a little bit, might feel like, "Well, what? I am just as good as the next person. Why would you not show mercy to me as opposed to someone else?" Well, I think maybe that's the wrong answer. Better answer is, "Well, I'm just as horrible as the other person." And we say that every Sunday, but I'm not sure we always think and remember that.

You know when we confess our sins, in the old liturgy, we say, "I, a poor miserable sinner." And in the new liturgy, we say, "Most merciful God, we confess that we are by nature, sinful and unclean." What are we saying when we say those things? We're saying, "I'm but a dog. I deserve absolutely nothing of the grace that You have given to us." And that's what our attitude should be. Coming from before God, we should have the attitude, "God, I don't deserve a thing but still have mercy on me for the sake of Your Son, Jesus Christ. Because it is only for His sake that I can be bold enough to come to You and trust that You work all things together for Your glory and for my good." And so while it sounds harsh, it's the reality, not just for this woman, but it's the reality for all of us. We are poor, miserable sinners. We are sinful and unclean. We have not done anything right in thought, word and deed. And the only claim that we can have on anything good that we have done, has been done by the power of the Holy Spirit and so He gets all the credit not us. And yet we are still called to understand and to know that we are precious in the eyes of the Lord. So precious that His Son was willing to die for us, that He might bring us back into the family of God. So yes, we are dogs. Yes, we deserve nothing but the wrath of God. And yes, we have no claim upon God except this, that He chooses by His grace and mercy to have a claim upon us. In His grace, He adopted us as His very own children. And we are marked by His presence in our lives and therefore Satan has no power to oppress or pose as us as is the case.

So Satan had to flee because this woman submitted herself and trusted in the Word of God that she had heard. She had heard the Word of God from somewhere and she believed that Word that said, this man, this Jesus, this son of David can do what I need, which is save me and save my daughter from her oppression. And we need that ourselves. We may not feel the direct oppression of Satan but our world out there around us is definitely putting the pressure on. The culture is getting hostile towards Christianity and people are not going to church because they see no point. They think that it is ridiculous, that it is foolish, that it is arrogant to think there's only one way to God. And so they mock and they ridicule and sometimes they even chastise us for being so narrow-minded. And yet we are still called to bow before our Lord and Savior and say, "Lord have mercy on us, we are being oppressed." So no matter what you feel, no matter how oppressed you feel, know this, that God gives generously beyond what we could possibly imagine. And He promises to give not just to the children of Israel but to all of us dogs out there as well, the Gentiles and all who believe the Word of God and call upon His name. That is a certain and sure hope and you need never doubt that.

May His grace, mercy and peace be and abide with you always, now and forevermore, unto life everlasting. Amen.