

Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> August 2023; Trinity 11; Benefice HC, Gilling

Last week the leader of the disciples, Peter, was told that he had very little faith. This week, an anonymous woman, who is not even Jewish, is told that she has great faith.

When Peter was caught in the storm in last week's reading, he took his eyes off Jesus and began to sink. When this woman is caught in a very different storm, she stayed focused on Jesus, and fell to her knees before him. So, what makes her faith great?

First of all, this woman's story reminds us that great faith often requires a great need. If we don't need Jesus greatly, then how can we ever have great faith in him? There are lots of people in our world who know that they need something, but they don't know exactly what they need. So, they try this, and they try that, but nothing seems to satisfy. It seems like a lot of our world's attention is focused on what we think will fill our need, and right now. This is the consumer advertising world we live in. We are bombarded by images telling us what our needs should be, and we are led and cajoled to keep up with the false conformities of our society, to make us feel valued, worthy.

Are we satisfied though? The Canaanite woman has great faith, not just because she is desperate for help, but because she comes to realize that her help can only come from Jesus. Great faith means recognizing our great need, and then turning to our great Savior, knowing what we need and knowing who alone can fill that need.

In the fourth century St Augustine said the same thing, "Thou hast created us for thyself, and our heart is not quiet until it rests in thee."

Yet, sometimes, like the Canaanite woman initially, the only answer when we request help, is silence, and that makes it seem as though

God is absent. The Canaanite woman is also challenged when Jesus responds to her request with silence, but she responds to his silence with persists in faith. In the face of silence, she does not give up. She does not turn from Jesus. Instead, she kneels before Jesus, and says again, “Lord, help me.”

Sometimes, when we don’t get the answer we want in prayer, we feel only silence, we may choose to give up. Or we can blame ourselves. It is our fault; and what can creep in is considering ourselves unworthy. We haven’t lived a good enough life. We haven’t had enough faith in God. We have disappointed God in some way. Who are we to even dare to ask God for help? But that is not how God works, as Julian of Norwich says, “prayer is not overcoming God’s reluctance. It is laying hold of His willingness.”

But here’s the good news that this Canaanite woman teaches us: Our worthiness has nothing to do with it. She is not worthy. And neither are we. But it doesn’t matter. Great faith doesn’t require us think we are worthy, because great faith turns us to the only one who can make us worthy, turns us to the one who died for us, and in doing so made us worthy to stand before Him. That is laying hold of God’s willingness.

We are reminded of this every time we say the Prayer of Humble Access, as we will today, “we are not worthy to gather up the crumbs from under thy table, but thou art the same Lord, who’s nature is always to have mercy.” God doesn’t change; His nature is always to have mercy always to love those who turn to Him and ask for help

By answering the prayer of the Canaanite woman, Jesus is telling her that it is not about her worthiness. It never was and the same applies to us. It’s about faith that persists and grace that responds and is freely given to us in which we all find our true worth. The all-encompassing gift of God’s love given to all of us by His Son at the cross. Great faith doesn’t rely on our worthiness, it relies on God

alone because His faithfulness is greater than anything.

Thanks be to God. Amen