

Sunday 16 August 2026 – Trinity 11 – Benefice Holy Communion, Gilling

Last week we heard how Peter, the leader of the disciples, was told by Jesus he had little faith. This week, an unnamed woman—an outsider who is not even Jewish—is told by Jesus, “Woman, great is your faith!”

What makes her faith great and how might our faith grow to become more like hers? When Peter was caught in a storm, he took his eyes off Jesus and began to sink. This woman is caught in a very different storm: her daughter is suffering, and she is desperate. Yet she keeps her attention fixed on Jesus. She cries out to him, kneels before him, refuses to turn away and persists in her plea. So, what does this teach us?

First, her story reminds us that great faith often begins with great need. Throughout the Gospels, those who show the deepest trust in Jesus are often those who know they cannot rescue themselves. They are the “poor in spirit” whom Jesus calls blessed. To be poor in spirit is not to despise ourselves. It is to recognise honestly that we do not have every answer, cannot put everything right and cannot heal every wound by our own strength. It is to put a humble trust in something greater in hope.

That can be difficult. We are encouraged to be self-sufficient, capable and in control. Yet sooner or later life shows us our limits. We cannot mend ourselves, our families or our world on our own. We need help. We need grace. We need Jesus.

The Canaanite woman knows her need. Her daughter is tormented, and a mother’s love drives her to seek help

wherever it may be found. She crosses boundaries of nationality, religion and custom. She risks rejection and embarrassment. She calls Jesus “Lord” and begs, “Have mercy on me.” Her need is great, and she places it before him without disguise.

Our world also knows great need: illness and loneliness, conflict and financial anxiety, damaged relationships, a wearying loss of hope and spiritual despair. But need alone does not necessarily create faith. We can know that something is missing and still look in places that cannot truly satisfy. We may seek security in possessions, approval, success or distraction. These things may help for a time, but they cannot bear the full weight of the needs of the human heart.

The woman’s faith is great not simply because she is desperate, but because she knows where to turn. She believes that mercy is found in Jesus. Even when his silence must have felt like rejection, she remains before him. Even when the disciples want her sent away, she continues to call. Even when the conversation becomes painfully difficult, she answers with courage and humility.

Last week we heard Peter cry to Jesus as he sank into the waters, “Lord, help me.”, and today we hear it repeated by the woman. It is one of the shortest prayers, yet it contains everything: honesty, dependence and trust. There may be times when we cannot find elaborate words. We may be too tired, too troubled or too afraid. This woman teaches us that three words are enough: “Lord, help me.”

Finally, great faith persists. Persistence is not pretending that prayer is easy or that every answer comes quickly. It is continuing to place ourselves and those we love into God’s

hands, even when heaven seems silent. It is returning to worship, returning to prayer and returning to hope. The woman does not deny the obstacles before her; she simply refuses to believe that the obstacles are greater than Christ's mercy.

Her persistence is answered. Jesus praises her faith, and her daughter is healed. The outsider becomes an example to the insiders. The one whom others would dismiss becomes the one whose trust is remembered. God's mercy is shown to be wider than the boundaries people draw, and no one who comes to Christ in faith is beneath his notice.

So, what might we learn from her today? Bring your need honestly to Jesus. Turn to him rather than to promises that cannot satisfy. Keep praying when the way is hard and notice those whom others overlook, because the grace of God often comes to us through people standing at the edges.

We do not need perfect faith. We need faith that knows its need, knows its Lord and keeps returning to him. When all we can say is, "Lord, help me," that prayer is heard, and Christ, whose mercy is greater than our fear and wider than our imagining, meets us there.

Thanks be to God. Amen.