

Lent II

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[0 : 00] The various scripture readings provided in the church's lectionary is not for the purpose of teaching us new and exotic ideas.

As a matter of fact, the scripture lessons are not text to be dissected, put under a microscope. They are stories, stories to be pondered, stories to be practiced in our lives.

That's why we have certain readings that come up quite frequently throughout our yearly lectionary in the church's calendar. One can think, for instance, of the story of Jesus multiplying the bread and the fish, which is read numerous times throughout the church year.

And this morning we have another example of a repeated story in the church's lectionary cycle. This is the story of a woman that was from the wrong side of the tracks.

We read about a woman from Canaan. The Canaanites were known to be as ruthless and pagan as they come.

[1 : 18] Canaanites were the descendants of the infamous Cain, the oldest son of Adam and Eve, who killed his brother Abel out of envy.

From Cain then came Lamech. We've talked about him before. Lamech was that ruthless murderer who boasted of his evil and wicked ways to others.

And eventually the descendants of Cain and Lamech were those who then possessed what was called the promised land. That land that was sworn to Abraham.

These Canaanites were eventually driven from that land by God's chosen leader, not Moses, but Joshua. What you need to know is simply this, that the Canaanites were again known as a people that practiced savagery of the worst kind.

And this included rape. This included even child sacrifice. Therefore, the term Canaanite conjured up images of genocide and absolute cruelty to those in the ancient world.

[2 : 36] So that's the backdrop to our gospel reading here from Matthew chapter 15 this morning. Because a Canaanite woman from Tyre and Sidon was crying out to the Lord and she was saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord.

My daughter is severely demon possessed. No one would have been shocked that a Canaanite was severely possessed by a demon. But this woman is not seeking help from Eshmon, the Phoenician god of healing, or any of the 26 plus deities worshipped by the Canaanites.

No. This woman comes to Jesus. And she refers to him as Lord. Lord.

And as the son of David. Our Lord does not initially respond to this Canaanite woman. And the disciples want this woman to be sent away.

And probably what they were really thinking, they wish that she would be taken out. Jesus finally says to this woman, I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

[3 : 59] And what this woman does next is absolutely astonishing. We read that she not only begs once again for mercy, but in Matthew chapter 15 verse 25 we read this.

Then she came and she worshipped him saying, Lord, help me. This woman is worshipping Jesus, calling him Lord.

Not seeking help from the gods of El, or Baal, or Asherah, or any other of the Canaanite deities. She is fixated on Jesus. And she calls him Lord. So much so that she bows and worships him.

Our Lord responds by saying, it's not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs. Not the most flattering statement. And this woman from the wrong side of the tracks quickly responds by saying, yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their master's table.

[5 : 17] Our Lord is so taken by this woman's faith and her worship that he says, oh woman, great is your faith. Let it be to you as you desire.

And we go on to read that this woman's daughter was healed from that very hour. As I said at the outset, the readings of the church here are not meant to be dissected, nor are they some kind of secret insight or knowledge.

We're not Gnostics. So what are we supposed to get out of this reading for this season of Lent? Why has the church included this in our lectionary?

I think first, it's so that we can recognize and rejoice in the fact that God's mercy knows no limits. Our Lord's grace, our Lord's mercy extends to those in Yemen as much as it does to those in Richmond. His property is always to have mercy.

[6 : 24] And this mercy is our comfort. The compassion of God is our comfort. Second, this Canaanite woman is an example of a person who truly believes.

She is not easily offended by the truth. She knows she accepts the stigma of being a Canaanite woman. She was perceived as being unclean.

She was a Gentile. And not just a Gentile, a Canaanite pagan. She was seen as a dog, an unclean animal.

And yet she's willing to accept the scraps that fall, the leftovers that fall from God.

She did not expect preferential treatment. Certainly she wouldn't have received it. She desired mercy, not privilege.

[7 : 29] And she put her belief into practice by humbling herself before our Lord. What an example.

What an example. She trusts in the mercy of God. And she now humbles herself before her God.

The final lesson has to do with where we turn in times of distress, in times of pain.

We read that this woman cries out to Jesus in the midst of her desperation. She's not looking to anyone or anything else. She is fixated on Jesus.

And this fixation on Jesus and crying out for mercy, the Kyrie, Lord have mercy. This is her worship. This is why we say the Kyrie.

Friends, this is to be our life as well. Family, government, money, nor anything else, can give you what you truly need.

[8 : 51] Only Christ can give you comfort, peace, and mercy. Therefore, in the midst of the heartache and all the pain, do what this Canaanite woman did.

depend on his mercy. Humble yourself. And look to him as your comfort and hope.

Come to him as helpless and broken, and he will heal you. God is merciful. No matter what lies in your past. No matter what skeletons you have in your closet.

God is merciful. God is merciful. God is merciful. And our God desires to bestow mercy upon you now, in the present, in this moment.

And to give you a future that is full of hope, not despair. Jesus is our ever-present help in times of trouble.

[9 : 55] He is our eternal hope. Therefore, dear friends, may we all, may we all learn and imitate this Canaanite woman.

And may our prayer simply be, have mercy on us, O Lord, Son of David. Amen. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

Amen.