

Lent II

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Date: 16 March 2025

Preacher: Father Randall Russell

[0 : 0 0] Amen. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

! But Jacob responds, I will not let you go until you bless me.

And then God relents. And Jacob receives his blessing and lets God go. And similarly in this morning's gospel, the Canaanite woman also refuses to let Jesus go until he blesses her.

Until he heals her demon-possessed daughter. But at first, at first our Lord ignores the poor woman. For he answered her not a word.

And then our Lord appears to tell this Canaanite woman, this Gentile, no, I will not heal your daughter. Because Jesus says, I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

[1 : 2 3] And then our Lord even goes so far as to even insult this distraught mother by calling her a dog.

For Jesus says to her, it is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs. Now, as far as I know, in the history of the Christian church, no one has ever, ever based their doctrine of God off of these two passages of Scripture.

Jacob wrestling with God and the Canaanite woman. Because how could they? In the case of Jacob, God appears weak. And in the case of the Canaanite woman, God appears unkind.

However, the same God who wrestled with Jacob and appeared weak is the same God who later allowed flesh and blood men to beat him and whip him and nail him to a cross in order to die so that all flesh and blood men might be blessed.

For the same God who in this morning's gospel did eventually show mercy to that Gentile woman who refused to let him go.

[2 : 4 8] Is the same God who again shows mercy to all us Gentiles today by feeding us with the true bread of heaven. The crumbs of which we are not even worthy to lick up off of the ground.

For this God is none other than Jesus Christ. The flesh and blood man. Who even when he appears weak, he is strong. And even when he seems unkind, he is still full of compassion.

For faith. Faith does not believe that God is good only when he appears to be good. No. Faith instead insists that God is good even when he doesn't act the way we think he should act.

And that God is good even when he doesn't answer our prayers the way we think they should be answered. And both the patriarch Jacob and the Canaanite woman are both examples of great, great faith.

For they both wrestled with God and prevailed. For having faith, and this is important, having faith does not mean that we will always live cushy and comfortable lives.

[4 : 13] And having faith does not mean that God will always appear to be a close, personal friend. In fact, sometimes God might even appear distant, cold, and uncaring.

Just as he did in this morning's gospel. And yet, every time the Lord draws back from us, we must insist that this is just another invitation for us to draw even closer to him.

To beg for mercy like a faithful dog. And to wrestle with God in order to be blessed. Nevertheless, I completely understand why in the history of the Christian church, no one has ever based their doctrine of God off of the stories of Jacob and the Canaanite woman.

Because it wouldn't make much sense. For again, in the case of Jacob, God appears weak. And in the case of the Canaanite woman, God appears unkind.

But do you remember what St. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 1, verses 20-25? He said, And as I read this, I would encourage everyone to turn their attention to the icon of Christ the Crucified.

[5 : 45] Look at that icon as I read these words. For in 1 Corinthians 1, verses 20-25, St. Paul said, and I quote, Where is the wise?

Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.

For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom. But we preach Christ crucified. To the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness.

But to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men.

And the weakness of God is stronger than men. End quote. And maybe that's where every Christian's doctrine of God should begin.

[7 : 02] At the cross. At the foolishness and weakness of God. Because our faith is not a matter of us knowing all there is to know about God.

As if that were even possible. And neither is our faith a matter of us just living our best lives now. Or having every prayer answered the way we might want.

For the same apostle who told us that the weakness of God is stronger than men. Is also the same apostle who once said, For when I am weak, then I am strong.

And he should know. St. Paul should know. Because he said those words right after the Lord refused three times to remove a thorn from his flesh.

And doesn't this describe the faith of Jacob and the Canaanite woman as well? For after Jacob wrestles with God, his hip is out of joint.

[8 : 13] And he is forced to hobble the rest of his way toward his brother Esau in order to make peace. And it was there in the midst of his weakness as a cripple that Jacob and Esau finally make amends.

Just as it was not on her own two feet, but on her hands and knees. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Therefore, let us humble ourselves before the Lord our God. For true faith means admitting that we don't have the answers.

But we trust in the one who does. And despite whatever we experience, despite however our prayers are answered, God is still good.

For when we are weak, we are still strong in him. In the name of the Father and of the Son of the Holy Ghost.

[9 : 27] Amen.