

Pastor Kenneth Mars
Christ the King Lutheran Church – Cody, WY
Reminiscere (Second Sunday in Lent)
March 5, 2023
Text: Matthew 25:21–28

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The Introit for today is taken from Psalm 25, a psalm of King David. Three times, David prays about God remembering. This first is a positive request, “Remember your mercy, O Lord, and your steadfast love, for they have been from of old” (vs. 6). The second is a negative request, by which I mean, David basically asks God to forget. “Remember not the sins of my youth or my transgressions” (vs. 7a). And then back to a positive request in 7b, “according to your steadfast love remember me, for the sake of your goodness, Lord.” The Bible teaches us that the Lord God of heaven and is omniscient, all knowing. God hasn’t forgotten about His mercy, goodness, or love. Nor can God simply forget something because we’re ashamed of.

David is using the language of repentance and faith. This is the way God’s people of all ages and times have prayed. When facing trials and afflictions, God’s people cry out in faith calling upon God to remember His love, mercy, and goodness so that they can receive it personally. Remember your mercy in my life. Let your love have its way with me. Remember Your goodness so that I may participate in Your goodness for without You, O Lord, there is only evil. By contrast, believers regularly call upon God to forget their sins and remove them out of His sight. This is another way of asking for forgiveness. Forgiveness basically means releasing someone from the just and right penalty they deserve because of their evil deeds. Remember not my transgressions, O Lord, remember Your mercy and love. For they have been from of old. Such is the cry of true Christian faith and hope.

The Canaanite woman in today’s gospel reading (Matt. 15:21–28) had such faith and hope in Jesus. This unnamed woman was a Christian coming to

Jesus asking Him to remember His mercy from of old and to deliver her daughter from demon possession (vs. 22). You parents and grandparents can certainly imagine this mother's terror and utter helplessness. Imagine your child being completely out of control. The demon dominates every action, thought, and deed resulting in physical illness, spiritual torment, and emotional trauma. And there's nothing you can do. No medicines, no therapies, do professionals you can call. In the end, it's simply complete dependence on God and Him remembering His mercies from of old.

We don't know anything else about this woman's situation. Was she married? Did she have other family members back home trying to care for her daughter? We don't know. But she comes to Jesus knowing and believing that He is the only hope and salvation for her daughter and herself.

But things don't look that promising for her. She's a Canaanite, a descendant of the original peoples the children of Israel tried to exterminate when they conquered the Promised Land. There was bad blood between the Jews and the Canaanites. Jesus and His disciples were Jews. This might explain why our Lord's disciples begged Jesus to send her away in vs. 23.

But she comes to Jesus using the language of the Jewish OT Scriptures. She calls upon Jesus as the Messiah, the Savior promised in the Jewish Bible. Listen to her cry, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon" (vs. 22). This too is the language of Christian faith that trusts God in the midst of deep affliction. Though not of the household of King David, she places herself under David's promise. A Son of David shall rule and reign upon David's throne forever (II Sam. 7). Such faith in Israel's God and Lord, makes her a child of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Galatians 3:7 says, "Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham." By faith, not bloodline or lineage, she is child of God, a daughter of Abraham, and an heir of salvation. And she cries out for mercy.

In this regard, we stand with her. For we share a common faith in the same Lord and Savior using the same language of mercy. Week after week, we

gather together in God's holy name calling upon Him to remember His love mercy, love, and goodness. Here is a believer calling upon her God in utter desperation. "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David." Jesus has power over demons. We know from reading Matthew's gospel Jesus has never once rejected anyone who has come to Him in faith and trust.

Until now. The Savior remains silent and unmoved. Vs. 23, "But he did not answer her a word." To this she kept saying again and again, "Lord, have mercy." But Jesus remains silent to her prayer. The disciples begged Jesus to send her away. This is not what we expected.

Jesus finally responds, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (vs. 24). *Your bloodlines do not go back to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. I can't help you.* Even though it appears Jesus has finally and irrevocably said no, she remained determined. According to vs. 25, she knelt before Jesus. She literally gets in front of Jesus and kneels before Him. This time, she simply says, "Lord, help me" (vs. 25). Even to this, Jesus seems cold and indifferent. "It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs" (vs. 26). Simply staggering! *My gifts aren't for you. It's not proper to throw the steak dinner prepared for God's children and throw it away to the pets, the little dogs.*

Dear saints of God, this woman's response is what we need to burn into our memory. Vs. 27, "Yes, Lord." Stop there. That's the language of faith and humility. Yes, Lord. No matter what you say, when you say it, how you say it, how often you say it. Yes, Lord. Your Word is true. Even when it judges and condemns me. We are truly poor, miserable sinners that deserve temporal and eternal punishment. To this, we must say, "Yes, Lord." Without qualification, self-justification, or even a hint of denial. This is the life of repentance without which there is no faith or salvation. Repentance is that most-precious gift that God works in our life when we see, by the clarity of His Word, that we have sinned and broken God's Law. And we must turn away from such evil. No excuses.

And that's the really hard part. For we want to justify ourselves, to explain our actions in such a way so as not to appear bad. And even at times we attempt to make our sinful thoughts and actions look righteous. But we must abandon all such ideas and intentions. Poor, miserable sinner with no claims of righteousness. We all deserve temporal and eternal punishment.

But, God has more to say to us and about us. The woman's response guides us here too, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from the masters' tables" (vs. 27). *Yes, Lord, I am not one of the lost sheep of the house of Israel. That is true. But I depend, nonetheless, upon the mercy of my Master. Yes, Lord. You are my Master and I am your little dog and so is my demon-possessed daughter. Yes, Lord. Give us what masters give to their pets, the crumbs from the table, and it will be more than enough. That's all the mercy my daughter and I need.* This is the language of faith, dear saints of God. This is our language, our hope, and our confidence. To all the difficulties in life: human relationship, physical and mental, financial and medical. To all these, we Christians says, "Yes Lord, your goodness is more than enough."

Notice how Jesus answers, "O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire" (vs. 28). The Lord Jesus saw and knew all along that she was a true child of the master's table. Though a Canaanite by natural lineage, she was a child of Abraham by faith, a true child of the Master. As the patriarch Jacob wrestled with God and prevailed (Gen. 32, OT text), so this Canaanite woman wrestled with God in repentance and faith and prevailed. Jesus, God in human flesh, did not forget His love, mercy, and goodness. Through this trial, He brought to light the purity and genuineness of her faith. The apostle Peter wrote words of encouragement and strength to Christians who were suffering for their Christian faith (I Peter 1:6–7):

⁶In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, ⁷so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by

fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

This woman's faith was more precious than the purest gold. The same is true of your most holy faith in Jesus. He remembers His love, mercy, and goodness. We have a Lord and Savior who knows and loves us in the midst of our trials and afflictions as well as times of joy and prosperity. His Word is true. We respond with "Yes, Lord." This is the language of faith and love. "Remember your mercy, O Lord, and your steadfast love, for they have been from of old." "Yes, Lord. It's all true."

✠ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. ✠ Amen.

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.