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“Cling to the Word”

Text: Matthew 15:21-28 (Romans 11:32; Psalm 28:6)

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

What do you do when what you experience in life does not seem to line up or agree with the Word of God? When what is happening to you even seems to contradict the Word of God?

The Word which says that God will provide for you (Matthew 6:25-33), but you've been in need for so long? The Word which proclaims that God will be with you always (Matthew 28:20), yet you've never felt so alone? The Word which teaches that you are a child of God (Galatians 4:4-7), baptized into Him, and that He will never leave you as an orphan (John 14:18), yet your Father has never felt so far away? The Word which trumpets that you are forgiven (Acts 10:43), yet you look at yourself and inside yourself and see nothing but a miserable, wretched sinner, and feel so unworthy and dirty and unclean? The Word which promises you every good (Romans 8:28), yet so much of what you receive seems anything but good?

How do you reconcile the Word which says God will always hear and answer every prayer (John 16:23), yet when you pray you seem to be like this woman we heard about today, whose prayers are met only with silence and rejection?

What do you do? Such times are hard, when Word and world conflict. But that is the reality we live in. This woman's reality. So by considering her, we see ourselves.

So first of all consider: *why was she there?* Well, because her daughter was **severely oppressed by a demon**. Maybe for some time now. And how do you fight against a demon? She needed help. . . . You know how it is, for demons are pressing hard, attacking, luring, and tempting you too. Into all manner of sins. What are they for you, that you wrestle with? Maybe severely. And your strength is not enough. You've tried, and failed. Fallen back into the old ways, the old sins, the old bad habits and despair. You need help too.

But do not overlook this fact: *why was she there?* Because first **Jesus had come to her**. The Son of God had come down from heaven in the flesh, and then Jesus went to her, to her area, to the district of Tyre and Sidon. First, the Lord of all invaded the enemy's territory to help, to rescue, and to save. . . . And again this is true for you as well. We have not a God who is far off, but a God who is near, who comes to us in our own flesh and blood, that we come to Him.

But still there is more, for *why was she there?* Because not only was Jesus there for her, but **she heard about Jesus**. Someone told her. Someone preached to her. Just as the angels proclaimed to the shepherds and John the Baptist pointed the crowds to Jesus, so she had been told this good news. Or maybe she heard Jesus herself - His preaching with an authority not of this world. . . . You've heard that word, that preaching, too. That here is hope for the hopeless, help for the helpless, and freedom for the possessed. And so you've come too.

And so with great boldness and in great desperation and with great hope, she comes to Jesus. And she gets . . . *not what we expect*. Not, I'm sure, what she expected. Not what Jesus' track record indicates she would get. She gets . . . *this*. The silent treatment, rejection, insult. Sand kicked in her face. Shoved to the back of the room. Acknowledged only to be rejected.

For this woman, the Word she had heard and what she was now experiencing were two vastly different - and seemingly even contradictory - things.

But she does not believe her experience. She does believe whatever emotions are surging from her heart. She does not believe the demons whispering to her to go away, that see? Jesus does not want to help you. No, she clings to Jesus. She clings to the Word and promises of God about Him. That Jesus is ***the Lord***. That Jesus is ***the*** promised ***Son of David***. That as Paul would later proclaim, Jesus has come to ***have mercy on all*** people. Including Gentiles. Including Canaanites. Including her.

And because of that, Jesus holds her up as an example of great faith. For this is what faith does - it clings to the Word and promises of God. Even when our emotions and experiences and other people in this world - even disciples - tell us otherwise. Because everything else is unreliable. Everything else in us and in this world has been tainted with sin. For sin isn't just the bad things we do, it is the disease that infects our minds and our emotions so they don't work as they should. That we think wrongly and interpret our emotions incorrectly and when left on our own, will think wrong things of God, too. And you can be sure the devil and his demons take full advantage of that, to *deceive us and mislead us in false belief, despair, and other great shame and vice* (Small Catechism, explanation to the Sixth Petition). Which means that any sentence that begins with "it seems to ME" or "it feels like to ME" frankly cannot be trusted.

Only sentences which begin with: *Thus saith the Lord* - only these are pure truth. Only these are to be relied on and trusted. Only these will give us the firm and certain foundation we need in a world full of trouble and strife, changes and chances, danger and need. Especially when our experiences and emotions are telling us one thing today and something else tomorrow. God doesn't change and His Word doesn't change, and so we have something *outside* of our infected, sinful selves to rely on.

That's what this woman did that day. She clung to the Word of God and would not let go. And not only the Word of God she heard that brought her there to Jesus that day, but also the words that Jesus spoke too. The words that sounded so harsh, yet in which this woman finds hope. For when Jesus says, ***"It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs,"*** the woman responds: *"You say that I am a dog. Let it be. I will gladly be a dog; now give me the consideration that you give a dog. I ask no more than a dog's rights. Give the children what is the children's; I don't ask for that. Give me the crumbs and I will be content with that"* (Luther, House Postils, Vol. 1, p. 325).

How different is that from what we hear in our world today - where so many are demanding rights and privileges and what they want from God? And when He doesn't deliver, see ya'!

No, it is not to those who think they are deserving or worthy that Jesus gives, but to the undeserving and the unworthy. Not to the Pharisees and Sadducees, but to the tax collectors and sinners. Not to those who think Jesus owes them something simply because they are physically descended children of Abraham, but to the *true* children of Abraham - those not according to the flesh, but according to the promise. Children by faith. Like this Canaanite woman. Like you.

And so she receives. The mercy she has come for. The mercy Jesus has come to give. Was it a crumb, was it more? It didn't matter! Faith doesn't measure the gift, but receives what God gives with thanksgiving. Believing that it is good and exactly what we need.

Faith doesn't measure the gift; it is the sin in us that measures gifts. Comparing what God has given to others and what He has given to me. Judging what God has given to me compared to what I asked for. But just as we cannot trust our emotions and experiences, so too we cannot trust our judgments here. What we think are mere crumbs might be much, much more. Like children rushing downstairs on Christmas morning, one child receiving a small box and one receiving a very large box, and immediately the jealousy begins - not even knowing what those boxes contain! Do we judge God that way? His gifts that way? His works that way? His love that way? Lots to repent of there.

Instead, believe the Word. What the world considers treasure - wealth and power and honors and glory - these are of little worth, really. They come and go and do not last. But what the world considers of little worth - the Church, the Word of God, the water of baptism, the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper, these are treasures containing far more than mere crumbs. They contain the death and resurrection of Jesus for you. They give you the fruits of His cross. They give you those gifts that will never end - His forgiveness, His life, His salvation, His Sonship, His Body and Blood. And that's true no matter what you feel or experience here - you have His Word and promise. For *thus saith the Lord*: I baptize you. I forgive you. This is My Body, My Blood. I am coming back.

You will be with Me in Paradise. Sure and certain, *these* words. Words of life. Words to cling to.

For no matter what the devil, the world, or your own sinful nature with its emotions and experiences wants you to believe, your Father in heaven, your Saviour Jesus, and His Spirit will not let you down. The struggles will continue, of that you can be sure. Those hours of deep need, darkness, and hurt. Such is life in this sinful world. But as we sang in the Introit earlier: ***The Lord is my strength*** - when I am weak - ***and my shield*** - when I am attacked; ***in Him my heart trusts*** - not my emotions or experiences - ***and I am helped***. And not just given a helping hand, but rescued, saved. For you are forgiven. It is finished (John 19:30). The Lord has mercied you. Cling to that *When in the Hour of Deepest Need* (Office Hymn, LSB #615). And every other hour too.

In the Name of the Father and of the (+) Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.