

SERMON

Br. Adrian

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

Today's Gospel poses many questions but today I wish to focus on just one central aspect; the Canaanite woman's humility and perseverance and the hope this can kindle in us through Jesus' healing and mercy.

First to the Canaanite woman. If we see her, not simply as a Canaanite woman, but the symbol of humankind, indeed the whole creation, then who with all honesty can examine themselves and not hear that cry for mercy welling up inside them? Who cannot hear the groans of the earth as it suffers under the weight of our resistance to this truth?

The truth is that we are all in need of the love and mercy of God. True humility is the recognition of the reality of who we are, with all our foibles, and the recognition that the only way we can be made whole is not by our own endeavours, but by the mercy of God, who already greatly loves us as we are.

The Canaanite woman represents the image of how we ourselves need to be in front of God. Jesus shows in his healing and forgiveness how we need to be with each other.

Looking at the human induced crises that the world is facing today, we are facing climate change, child poverty, regular pandemics, huge disparities between rich and poor. With these issues and more, this is no time to be looking in on ourselves, putting up barriers and turning away from our responsibilities, building our fortresses, of various degrees of nationalism on the foundations of the quicksand of fear and an excessive reliance on ourselves. This is the false vision for survival as the reality of what we are seeing going up around our world today.

There is however another reality, another vision, one rooted in the Gospels and in our readings today, one full of hope and much needed in the current times.

The passage from Isaiah speaks both of covenant and of bringing others to God, others in addition to the house of Israel. By using the language of covenant, it is a great reminder of how God's faithfulness is proven by his promises being fulfilled in the scriptures. Our Gospel reading today confirms this.

Jesus crosses the border to meet the Canaanite woman, and the woman crosses a cultural boundary in her search for mercy and healing. They turn away from themselves and their homes, and towards an encounter with each other, one in repentance and need, the other in mercy and compassion for the one who believes.

In the somewhat fearful and confused times that we are in, it is easy to try and simplify, compartmentalise, our groups of people, to turn inwards in prioritising our desires. It is also understandable to fear rejection if we do step across boundaries. Today's gospel reading is a challenge to some of our natural inclinations, and instead of closing in on ourselves, to reach out in compassion and mercy as we are, and not to give up our hope in the redemptive power of God. That power to lift us out of our fears and our errors, to show mercy and to transform us to become more fully who we are, to set us free.

The Canaanite woman, when first seemingly ignored and rebuffed, did not give up. She persevered in hope.

Sometimes when our own faith is hanging by a thread, when evil or indifference appears to be taking hold, or we face rejection, it is easy to try and protect ourselves and walk away from life's challenges, but the gospel should give us courage not to lose hope in these circumstances, and instead to continue to turn outwards in love, to continue in prayer and in the hope and knowledge that God does not fail to fulfil his promises and his grace towards us has no boundaries.

Life in a Benedictine community teaches many things but especially the need for mercy, that power of hope in the grace of God to overcome weakness of faith. The maintenance of hope and perseverance in the face of struggles, and the gradual growth of humility and love that comes through such perseverance are some of the main aspects.

St. Benedict's Rule teaches us to treat the other as Christ. Seeing Christ in the other person, who perhaps I can't stand, who differs from me in most ways, who in most areas is completely foreign to me. This is one of the most challenging aspects of the life, but it also follows the teaching of today's gospel and is most rewarding.

We don't need to fear, we don't need to give up hope. We can turn outwards towards others, not just to family, friends and neighbours. We need to continue to expand our horizons, our boundaries of compassion and love, in the hope of the coming of Christ and our salvation. We should turn to the refugee, to the stranger, turn to the person we struggle to get on with, the outcast. Share with them that compassion, that healing and mercy that Christ shows to the Canaanite woman, and we should always turn in prayer for the healing of ourselves and of our world. If we are rejected, we should not lose hope.

Let's not underestimate the power of our witness to God's grace, even if it is not apparent at the time, nor underestimate our personal testimonies to the history of redemption in Jesus Christ. Let's continue to persevere, continue to turn to the other in mercy, compassion and love. And may the grace of the Lord Jesus be with us and the love and joy of the risen and ascended Lord Jesus dwell and grow in our hearts now and forever. Amen.