

Great Faith

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"What great things would you attempt to do, if you knew you could not fail?" This question haunts me. It haunts me when I think about the rest of my life and what God wants me to do with it. It haunts me when I think of God's plans for our church and what we might do if we were not afraid of failing? It haunts me when I think of our community and the needs of people and what lives might be transformed by God's love if we together would sacrifice to make a difference. What would happen?

All of us have dreams of a better life. We have hopes for a healthier, happier, more secure future. But unfortunately, most dreams fail because we look at the challenges. And we like Peter, begin to lose our faith. Instead of walking on water with Jesus, we fall into the sea and are overcome by our problems. In the midst of the storm, Jesus said to Peter. "***Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid.***" And to Peter's credit, he jumped out of the boat and he began to walk on the water, but when Peter took his eyes off Jesus, he lost his way. This pretty much describes where the church finds itself today. Jesus has called us to share the good news of His salvation with the world, but instead of helping to redeem the world, we find ourselves crying out to God to save us, help us to survive. Jesus' question to Peter was, "***Why didn't you believe me? Why did you doubt that I would help you do what you had to do?***" "***You of little faith.***" Ouch! In the book of James it says, "***When a person asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does.***"(James 1:6-8)

The very definition of God means the one who is able. In times of trouble, Jesus is able to help us. He is the Lord of heaven and

earth. He is almighty. The miracle of the feeding of the five thousand and the miracle of the calming of the sea, help us to understand that Jesus can help us, no matter what our situation. So if Jesus can help us, then the next question is "*Will he help us?*" Will he help you? Will he help me? Will he help the church, or our community or the world? St. Paul answered these questions with an affirmative, "YES!" "***Because if God did not spare his own Son but gave Him up for us all, how will He not also, along with Him, graciously give us all things?***" (Romans 8:32) Then there is only one other question, "*Do we believe it?*" God can put gold in a gold mine, but the gold will remain undiscovered and unused unless a miner has faith to work the mine. In Hebrews, it defines faith as "***Being sure of what we hope for, and certain of what we do not see.***" (Hebrews 11:1) This is what makes the story of the Canaanite woman so powerful. She was sure Jesus not only could help her daughter, but she also believed that He would help her, and she got involved.

Our Gospel story this morning takes place right after the feeding of the five thousand. This miracle caused so much excitement that the people wanted to make Jesus their king. The religious leaders, on the other hand, were so threatened by Jesus' ministry they sought to put Him to death. Jesus knew that His ministry was coming to an end and He wanted time to minister to His disciples. So He left Galilee and went to a place where the crowds and the religious leaders would not follow Him. He went into Canaanite territory around Tyre and Sidon. Good news travels fast, particularly if it is filled with hope. The news of Jesus' ministry and the hope He brought to the lives of people, preceded Him to Tyre and Sidon. Matthew tells us that soon after Jesus arrived there, He was approached by a Canaanite woman whose daughter's life was in trouble. Women were not supposed to address men in public, but when you love someone you bend the rules. Jesus healed on the Sabbath. Didn't He? He bent the rules. This mother loved her daughter enough to do whatever was needed to make sure her daughter was all right. She cried out to Jesus, "***Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is suffering terribly from***

demon-possession.” And there is no response. Nothing! Jesus does not say one word to her.

There are times when we pray when it appears God is not listening. When that happens it is easy to become discouraged. The Canaanite woman had every reason to be discouraged by the lack of Jesus’ response. But if you love someone, you are willing to take rejection. You do not stop seeking help. Because Jesus did not respond to her, this woman goes to the disciples, maybe they would influence Jesus to help her daughter. Well, that did not work either. Instead, of asking Jesus to help her daughter, the disciples asked Jesus to help them. **“Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us.”** Jesus did not help the disciples either, He said, **“This is not my problem. I have come to help the lost sheep of Israel.”** And as soon as He finished speaking to his disciples, the mother comes to Jesus again. This time she throws herself to the ground and kneels at His feet, saying, **“Lord help me.”** The word “Lord” means the one who is the master of our life. This was an act of worship. And yet again Jesus responds to her by saying, **“It is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to their dogs.”** And she faithfully responds, **“Yes, but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master’s table.”** Wow! No matter what happened, this mother continued to believe. She believed God loved Israel and sent Jesus as their Messiah. But she also believed God’s love is inclusive of all people. When you read this story you cannot help feeling Jesus’ delight in this mother’s faith. **“Woman, you have great faith!”** Your request is granted and from that very hour, her daughter was healed.

What joy it gives God when we persevere in prayer and don’t give up on God’s love for us. There are three elements of great faith. The first is humility. The Canaanite woman realized that she was not Jewish and that Jesus was the Messiah to the Jews. She recognized that she was an outsider. The truth is we are all outsiders. None of us deserve God’s blessing because of our sin. Great faith begins by understanding who we are.

The second element of great faith is understanding who Jesus is. Jesus is the Son of God and the Savior of the world. Jesus showed us God's heart on the cross. He died for sinners. He died for you and he died for me. The woman believed that God loved her and cared about her daughter. We need to believe this too. The final element of great faith is to trust in God's love and mercy no whatever our situation. Faith does not trust in what is seen but in what is unseen. It believes in the promises of God to answer prayer. It holds to God's promise to be with us. It believes that God works for good in our lives. It believes in the power of God to bless the world, no matter what is going on. St. Paul said, "***In all things we are more than conquerors.***"

Because the woman loved her daughter, she endured failure and rejection so that her daughter would be well. This is the challenge we are facing. People are hurting all around us. People are looking for hope. Do we love enough to pray for our community, to pray for our country, to pray for our world? We know God loves everyone. The question is, do we? If we love our neighbor, God will show us a way to serve them. The Canaanite woman's daughter was healed because her mother loved her enough to get involved to help her. We look at the world and all that is going on around us and we lament, "*What a shame.*" The question is, do we care enough to get involved to share God's love?

“Lord, make me an instrument of Your peace; where there is hatred, let me sow love; Where there is injury, pardon; Where there is doubt, faith; Where there is despair, hope; Where there is darkness, light; and where there is sadness, joy. O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled, as to console; to be understood, as to understand; to be loved, as to love; for it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned, and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.”

- St. Francis of Assisi.