

Grace and peace to you my friends and fellow sojourners from Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior.

I begin today with some thoughts that are probably not reasonably linked to our readings today. You might ask why? And you would have every right to do so. The truth is I was at one of my many doctor's offices on Wednesday when I saw a man wearing a tee shirt that said on the back: "Without a fight, there is no victory." For the record, there were other symbols and sayings on the shirt that led me to believe that this was, in fact, a Christian oriented shirt. This saying prompted me to do a little online research.

I found numerous references around this saying at a site called bibleversesnow. They said quote - "There is no victory without a battle is a quote by Joshua, the author of the Book of Joshua, as a reminder that your success depends on **you**. If you are not willing to do what it takes to win, then you will not win. This is especially true in your business and personal lives - unquote. The site goes onto say quote - when you have the opportunity to fight for something, don't pass it up. Don't let yourself fall into the trap of thinking that you can't win. You can and you will! - unquote. There was another site by Pastor Kurt Fuller with a focus on the idea of **continuing** to fight. Needless to say this all hit one of my many nerves.

So here are the issues I have with this kind of theology. First, I think this type of thinking comes from our culture, our society, and our world. It **does not**, in my opinion, come from the Bible or God or Jesus. Now, in case you are wondering, yes there are lots of references to armor, and battles, and fighting in the Bible. As usual, how one decides to read these references often depends on one's biases, lenses, and perspectives. If one sees God as a God of anger and judgement, then battles and fighting is what one will see in scripture.

Second, to me this theology is all about **ourselves** which negates the necessity for Jesus. If there is something that **I** can do by fighting to earn and protect my salvation then God's **grace** is no longer in play.

Finally, this type of theology negates Jesus' actions and words on the cross. "**It is finished**" becomes meaningless. I cannot recall Jesus putting up much of a fight before dying for us. In fact, Jesus washed the feet of and served the last supper to Judas even though Jesus knew Judas was the betrayer. This theology also negates Jesus' words about caring for each other, loving each other, and serving each other. It is pretty hard to love and serve when you are fighting. I could go on and on about the things Jesus said we should do that are no longer applicable if **we** choose **this** type of theology.

I think Martin Luther said what I am trying to say this way: "*The sin underneath **all** our sins is to trust the lie of the serpent that we cannot **trust** the love and grace of Christ and must take matters into our **own** hands.*" Is this not the idea that we must fight for God, for ourselves?

Now, I do not want you to think that I am condemning or judging these types of Christians, although I am **absolutely** sure that that is the way it is coming across. I often describe these types of Christians as being Jesus' Pharisees in today's world. Jesus often had un-nice things to say about the Pharisees but Jesus **never** condemned the Pharisees.

Our gospel reading today begins with Jesus talking to a crowd, including some Pharisees, about how and what defiles a person. Because the Pharisees had many concerns and rules about how and what a person eats defiling a person, Jesus focuses on a person's digestive system and says that nothing we eat can defile us because it passes right through us to the sewer system. But rather what we think and feel from our heart, from within is what defiles; like adultery, deception, fornication, murder, or theft, etc. Notice that class, disability, ethnicity, gender and race are **not** mentioned as defiling agents.

That my friends was just the first part of our gospel reading today. In the second part Jesus has an interaction with a Canaanite woman who simply says to Jesus: "**Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon.**" First, notice that she does not ever explicitly seek healing for her daughter, she only asks for mercy from Jesus. Second, were you may be surprised by Jesus' typical male non-response to her. Or third, were you surprised by the disciples animosity in asking for Jesus to just **send** her away.

Well, then, how did the fourth response to her strike you. Is this the picture of Jesus you have? For Jesus to essentially say, "Woman you are of no concern to me, I am only here to find lost sheep of Israel." Fifth, do you think she is faithful or obnoxious or just persistent? Could **you** say to Jesus that "**even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from the masters' table?**" Finally, did you see what Jesus' final response to her is? Jesus simply says: "**Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.**" In other words, Jesus does not directly or specifically heal the woman's daughter.

Is it possible God is using a woman for at least the second time to redirect Jesus' thoughts on the mission. The first time was at the wedding in Cana when Mary convinced Jesus it really was time for Jesus' ministry to begin. And now, the Canaanite woman convinces Jesus that the ministry now needs to go beyond boundaries.

Our lives are filled with boundaries. These boundaries can be of our own making; or inherited; or passed down by leaders, especially religious leaders, from generation to generation and from site to site. Boundaries are often part of or the same as our biases, lenses, and perspectives. When I was in the military we had a phrase that said rules are meant to be broken. I think the same philosophy applies to boundaries as well.

For the record, our Isaiah reading today also talks about boundaries being broken. It addresses the reality that God's blessing spills over the boundaries assumed by God's people – the insiders. Are you, are we assuming we know God well enough to identify or set **God's** boundaries? I would suggest this kind of assumption is very dangerous for us and for others. Isaiah tells us that the Lord's "*steadfast and sure love for David*" **spills** over into the world. The everlasting **covenant** is not about exclusion but rather it is about inclusion. Radical inclusion. An inclusion so radical that it reinterprets scripture. An inclusion where **all** are welcome. An inclusion based on the faith that **trusts** in the love, mercy, and promises of God.

Tim Keller wrote: "*Mercy and forgiveness must be free and unmerited to the wrongdoer. If the wrongdoer has to do something to merit it, then it isn't mercy, but forgiveness always comes at a cost to the one granting the forgiveness.*"

Think of how much God's forgiveness and mercy cost. **It cost Jesus.**

Hear then the good news:

The Canaanite woman's story is not about what faith **is**, like some sort of **definition** for all times and places.

Faith is not a fixed collection of beliefs but rather a state of **being**.

Your faith is great, not because of what you **do**, but because of who you **are**.

You are a child of God. Baptized, marked with the cross of Christ forever, **and** heir to the kingdom of God.

Tim Keller said: "*Mercy isn't just the job of the Christian. Mercy is the **mark** of the Christian.*"

Grace and peace to you, my friends. Live in faith and grant mercy.

**Amen**