

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

Today we are going to talk about a hero of the faith.

Pray

Pastor Bryan Wolfmuehler wrote a book in recent years titled 'A Martyr's Faith in a Faithless World.' It is about the Martyrs, the heroes of the faith. This is what he says about heroes of the faith:

The Christian hero is not the person who has obtained all that he or she desires in this life. Our heroes are not those who have gained the entire world but lost their soul. Our heroes are not those who have achieved a great degree of worldly success or notoriety. Our heroes are those who have fought the good fight and kept the faith, and who have finished the race. Our heroes are those who have stood against the wiles of the devil, who have stood against the wild beasts (see 1 Corinthians 15:32) of the world and the flesh. And having stood, our heroes are those who have died the blessed death.

Hebrews 11 put these heroes before us and gives us clarity as to why they are heroes. Abel, Enoch, and Noah are not our heroes because they experienced all this world had to offer. Abraham and Sarah are not our heroes because they lived the life of their dreams. Jacob, Joseph, and Moses are not our heroes because of their fame or fortune. They are our heroes because they trusted in God. They are our heroes because they believed in the things God promised, things that they did not live to see. They never let go of these promises—not in life, in sorrow, in suffering, not even in death.

Pastor Jefferey Hemmer who Tasmin and Pastor Sam heard speak last weekend also highlighted that we should learn from the Martyrs. Incidentally Pastor Wolfmuehler is also coming to Australia to speak in Hamilton Victoria and Adelaide South Australia at the Creative Word Fellowship Speak Lord Conferences, you should try to get to one of those conferences especially if you are already traveling on the mainland in late September or early October.

We need heroes who trust in their Saviour and run the race of faith; in the Gospel reading today we have such a hero. She is a hero, a nameless hero for 5 reasons and this sermon is going to contrast those reasons with the actions of those around her.

1. She is a hero of the faith, her faith is great as Jesus says, because she knows who Jesus is; "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon." Matthew 15:22 (ESV)

She knows his proper name, Son of David, and his title Lord. It's as if she's got Old Testament training, she calls him Lord as the Jewish people call God Lord, it is a connection to the proper name that God gave to Moses on the mountain, I am! The name that got Jesus in trouble with the Sanhedrin when he said 'before Moses was, I am'. She knows that Jesus is God. She knows he is a descendant of King David and therefore the promised Messiah.

But she is a Canaanite woman. She is a descendant of a people that were so corrupt God intended to exterminate them. She is a remnant of the inhabitants of the land that the Israelites should have eliminated. She has no right to know the true God, she is not an Israelite, yet she does, and she confidently uses his name.

Contrast that with the disciples who think he's a ghost when he comes walking on the water. They think he's an evil spirit and even when he tells them not to be afraid and identifies himself, Peter still doubts and wants proof.

True faith is found in the strangest of people. Our hero today despite her lineage appears to have a stronger faith than even Jesus' closest disciples at the time.

2. She is a hero of faith because she knows that he has what she needs. Not only does she know who he is, but she knows what he has, and she knows that it is for her. The very thing that will set her and her daughter free is found in this man, and she is certain that he will deliver her!

Contrast this with the disciples who never seem to be sure what Jesus is going to deliver, and the Pharisees and other religious leaders who think that the Messiah will come to deliver an earthly kingdom. Strangely enough, even these disciples who appear to have many shortcomings in the gospels become heroes of the faith after the resurrection.

3. She is a hero of faith because she knows what he's been doing and what he is capable of. How does she know about all these things? How does she know of his healing ability, his power over evil spirits, his identity? This is never revealed to us, how she found out, no one tweeted the message about Jesus, although they were all talking about it, yet she is a long way off, she's not from the Israelite nation and not living in the land where Jesus did most of his work. But she knows what he can do.

Contrast that with the disciples who want to send her away, they don't think Jesus can feed so many people with so little bread and fish.

Here is where our faith sometime goes off track, we incorrectly identify Jesus and expect things from him that he didn't promise. This can be detrimental to faith leaving us disillusioned, bitter, angry, and resentful. When we miss identify Jesus and expect things from him that he didn't promise we are in grave danger. Sometimes we do this because we have been taught wrong things about Jesus, other times it is because we failed to hear what he says about himself. Perhaps this is why many wander off from the faith. They either (a.) don't think they need what Jesus has, forgiveness of sin is unnecessary and so Jesus seems unnecessary. Or (b.) think that they somehow deserve what Jesus has to give, they demand it from him on account of their own good behaviour or self worth instead of begging for the gift, even accepting that we don't deserve the gift, yet knowing that God is so generous to us that he gives it anyway.

This is the faith of the Canaanite woman, even when Jesus suggests to her that she doesn't deserve what he has, she willingly accepts his assessment and knows the correct answer. Even the dogs get the crumbs from the master's table. She only wants a tiny drop of his healing power, a crumb that would be cleaned up by household pets will be enough for her, she knows this, she trusts him that it is enough.

4. She is hero of the faith because she knows about these crumbs and is willing to accept them as a free gift. She apparently knows about the feeding of the 5000 that Matthew records in the previous chapter; ²⁰ And they all ate and were **satisfied**. And they took up twelve baskets full of the broken pieces **left over**. Matthew 14:20 (ESV) And she preempts the feeding of the 4000 that Matthew records later in this chapter; ³⁷ And they all ate and were **satisfied**. And they took up seven baskets full of the broken pieces **left over**. Matthew 15:37 (ESV)

She knows that the gifts Jesus has to give are boundless and plentiful. There are always leftovers, God's grace overflows. It is not limited. She knows and trusts that even a crumb that a little dog would clean up under the table is enough to satisfy her and set her daughter free. So, she gladly accepts her position in life and receives the gift.

5. She is a hero of the faith because she is faithful. That is, her heart is in the right place, it has been changed from unclean to clean because she is willing to trust in the promise of God.

Contrast that with the Scribes and Pharisees in the text that the lectionary kindly skipped over:

⁸ “ ‘This people honors me with their lips,
but their heart is far from me;
⁹ in vain do they worship me,
teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’ ” Matthew 15:8–9 (ESV)

The Scribes and Pharisees are these who refuse to accept the gift, nor receive it. They do not trust in the promise but only in their own understanding. Therefore, they wreck their faith, if they ever had faith. On the other hand, she is grafted in as a new shoot, a new branch of great faith.

In this contrast the Pharisees and Scribes who claim the privilege of being Jewish and think that they are saved by the national heritage, but have coming from their hearts evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a person (Matthew 15:19–20 ESV). They are the defiled ones, yet the Canaanite woman has coming out of her heart faith, trust in the promise of God, and desire to receive the very things that Jesus came to deliver. She is the 'all nations' that have seen the saving power of God and now desire to praise him.

This Canaanite woman is a hero of the faith because; she knows who Jesus is, she knows what he can do, she knows the gifts he has to give and she trusts they are for her, and she knows her humble position is purely receptive, not deserved, and she is grateful for those crumbs that fall to her, sustaining her and setting her and her daughter free.

Learn from this hero of the faith and continue to come and receive the gifts that God promises to give you in his Word, in your Baptism and in his Holy meal.

Amen

The peace of God that surpasses all our understanding, keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Amen