



Lord,
help me to
walk in faith,
strengthened
by Your love.
Amen

Lord, Help Me

Focus Scripture - Matt. 15:10–28

“Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me!

My daughter is demon-possessed and suffering terribly.”

He answered, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.”

The woman came and knelt before him. “Lord, help me!” she said. He replied, “It is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to the dogs.”

Yes it is, Lord,” she said.

“Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master’s table.”

Then Jesus said to her, “Woman, you have great faith!

Your request is granted.”

And her daughter was healed at that moment.

August 20, 2017

Thought for the Week

Scriptures: Isaiah 56:1. 6-7 • Romans 11:13-15. 29-32

I am sure it is not news to any of you gathered together in our church today that there are hundreds, perhaps millions of others similarly gathered in other churches around the world. Many religions are known by different names; people practice their faith in different ways, but what is common to us all is that we believe that there is something deeply spiritual in what we believe and what we do. Religions have been part of the human condition and of human practice for as long as we have inhabited planet earth.

Sadly, of course, history also reminds us that our spiritual relationship with one another has not always been amicable: wars of religion dot our history books; there has even been a long and personal history among us of being critical of one another. Many people believe that their denomination is the only one that has ever existed; or they imagine that theirs is the only one God really cares anything about. My experience as a member of the Community of Christ is that we often think of followers of other religions don't have the fullness of the gospel; think of how Catholics trace their heritage directly back to Jesus and the apostles, but should that reflect negatively on the faith of other communities of faith that have historically come on the scene later in history? A lot of history has transpired in our world since the time of Jesus; religions have been developing among people of every age since the beginning of history.

Now think also of this: Christians have received the origins of their faith from the People of Israel, the Jews: Jesus was a Jew, all the apostles and the early Christians were Jews. That would lead us to say, therefore, that all religious experience, all the different forms of religious expression, derive from the inspiration God, sets into the hearts of all people to be in touch with the divine.

Historically, of course, religions and their rites have taken different forms depending on language, culture and the insights of the specific leaders. In short, it seems obvious that all people of faith hunger for the same thing but practice their faith in different ways.

Now as we turn to the scriptures we find three authors, Isaiah the prophet, Paul and Jesus, each in turn speaking of one common truth, namely that even though people may express their faith in different ways, the one common goal for all must be to become servants of the One God. Isaiah, for instance, reminds the Israelites that even foreigners shall join themselves to the Lord, the God of Israel, hold firmly to God's Covenant and join in joyful prayer. "My house" God proclaims "shall be called a house of prayer for all people." Today, we would call that "Ecumenism."

In his letter to his Roman converts Paul assures them that he, a Jew by birth, takes great satisfaction in his ministry of bringing both Jews and gentiles together under the one covenant of God's reconciliation. "Now," he writes, "there is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither male nor female, neither circumscribed or un-circumscribed; we are all one in Christ Jesus."

Finally, we read in the gospel of Mathew an interesting little encounter between Jesus and a Canaanite woman who pleads to him for a cure of her daughter. Initially, Jesus betrays his Jewishness saying that his mission is not for gentiles. After some insistence by the woman, however, Jesus praises her great faith. "Immediately the woman's daughter got better."

So, what we learn from these three scriptural incidents and even from common experiences is that, with an open mind, we will find more similarities than differences in our common religious search for God.

Random Inspiration

I have a good reason every time I say no to my son's request for candy. Don't get me wrong, treats are great and have their place, but they should be a rare and special thing. He may not understand why I say no on any particular instance, but he has come to accept that I'm true to my word and will make good decisions. But, that doesn't mean I won't respond to a random request at just the right time.

Faith is not a slot machine. No matter what you read out there, you can't look to the sky, ask for a million dollars, and expect the bills to start raining down. But, you can ask, open yourself up for the answer God has for you, and choose to make the answer work in your life. You don't know what's best for you, but He does.

Grab your nearest Bible, open it up to a random spot, point your finger to any old place on the page, and read at least one verse. Slowly. Really digest the words. Roll them around in your head and heart. Close your eyes and see what pictures you see. How could this apply to your life? Open your heart and learn to see the world from Jesus' point of view.

Be Quick, Get Help

You know those people who always seem to know the right thing to say at exactly the right time? How do they do it? Do they just go home and practice responses day in and day out until they have every base covered? Or is there something else there that gives them the edge in being always present, always on top of things, and always ready to communicate with power?

The wheels of your brain machine get a little squeaky when they're thrown off track. Frustration, difficulty, and anger can throw us so far off balance that our usual systems don't work properly. Lashing out, saying the wrong thing, or just giving up are the last thing you want to do. But do you know you have other choices? There are other choices that actually help you grow.

When you get frustrated, say a quick prayer for help. Make it something easy to remember and bring to mind at the blink of an eye. Something like, "God, please help me." Or maybe try, "Jesus, thank you and I love you" whenever you feel like it, too.

What you focus on, focuses you. Focus on Infinite Love.