

ST PAUL'S (RONDEBOSCH)

SUNDAY 5 SEPTEMBER 2021

READINGS: PROVERBS 22:1-2, 8-9, 22-23// PSALM 125/ JAMES 2:1-17

MARK7:24-37

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*Open the heavens Holy Spirit
For us to see Jesus interceding for us
May we be strengthened to share his cup
And ready to serve him forever. AMEN*

What gives you hope?

A general well-known proverb reads “Hope is the last thing to die” We humans need hope, especially in difficult times, in crisis situations. So the longing for a glimmer of hope is also alive now. Hope for the end of the pandemic, for a good vaccine, an effective medicine. Hope that the economic situation will improve again... that shops and restaurants will not close completely but will be able to continue offering their services. Hope that we will soon be able to meet and socialize together with friends and families. You will agree with me our faith and trust are really being tested (challenged). We often hear we must think positive in every situation and to find the good side of it. And yes this is very important. However how do we manage when we are hit really hard? When a child a loved one is terminally ill? When I lose my job? When relationships break down (Schoenstadt)

Where do I go to in times like these? What gives me hope?

In last week's gospel text, Jesus challenged the Pharisees and scribes for their ideas of “purity” and their judgment of those who did not conform to their standards of piety. Following this confrontation Jesus went to the “impure” territory, the Gentile region of Tyre and Sidon and met a Canaanite woman (Syro-Phynicain)

In the Old Testament times Tyre and Sidon the region of the Phoenicians, better known as Canaanites tribes. They were pagans who worshiped Phoenician gods. These historical events would not make the Canaanites very friendly towards Jews nor towards the Jewish God.

But here we have a Canaanite woman approaching Jesus?

Let us turn to our gospel passage and examine the plight (request) of this woman and Jesus' response to her plight (request).

In Mark 7 v 24 we read “A woman who whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately heard about him and she came and bowed down at his feet. Now the woman was a Gentile of Syro-phoenician origin. She begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter

The woman who approaches Jesus breaks through every traditional barrier that should prevent her from doing so. She is “a Gentile, of Syro-phoenician origin” (Mark 7:26). In other words, she is impure, one who lives outside of the land of Israel and outside of the Law of Moses, a descendant of the ancient enemies of Israel. She is also a woman, unaccompanied by a husband or male relative, who initiates a conversation with a strange man — another taboo transgressed. On top of all of this, her daughter is possessed by a demon. Just think of the stigmatization and judgement from her community. This woman and her daughter were not the kind of family most people would like to socialize with.

But this woman came to Jesus because she was desperate and he was her only hope.

Perhaps she had heard reports about the healing miracles of Jesus. Her need was so great. Her concern for her daughter so deep, that she dared cross that rift between Jews and Canaanites. She was at the point where she had nothing to lose, and perhaps everything to gain. She comes and cries out to Jesus for help. She had nothing to offer him (*no great Jewish faith, no great obedience, no great religious piety,*) but she hoped and trusted him to give her what she needed.

How many of us can identify with this poor, anxious mother especially this past year? Perhaps you are at our wits end over some situation in our lives and you need help. Perhaps you have exhausted every means at your disposal and do not know where to turn for help. Whatever the need in your lives may be today; you should take a lesson from this woman: Get that need, challenge, and problem to Jesus!

Regardless of what we face in our lives today, the answer will be found in Him! Our hope is Jesus Christ. Don't be afraid to call on Him; He invites you to come.

Note the woman's persistence

In v 27 -28 He said to her let the children be fed first for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs. But she answered him Sir even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs

As Jesus speaks to this woman, **verse 27**, His words appear harsh to our ears. His words must have shaken her to the very core of her being. His words probably broke her heart. He tells her that His whole purpose in coming to this world was to reach the lost sheep of Israel. When she persists, Jesus tells her that she is a dog and does not deserve the children's bread.

It must have appeared to her that her situation was hopeless. But yet she persevered she was persistent even if it is only the crumbs.

Some of us have been praying and seeking God about matters that trouble our heart. We have cried out to Him and asked Him to do this or that in our lives and there has been no answer. We feel like giving up! Let me of God's unwillingness to meet our needs. God's silences serve to test our faith and to remind us that He operates on a different time-frame that we do.

My dear friends' do you feel like throwing up your hands and quit seeking God about the answer you need? Don't too much is at stake.

Be like this poor mother. Keep bringing that need to Jesus until He answers. Keep seeking His face until He responds. Keep asking, keep seeking, keep knocking and in His time, He'll hand you down a morsel of answered prayer!

What was Jesus' response to the woman's request?

At first Jesus was harsh to her unlike the compassionate loving Father that we know, (*who tells us to love our neighbour as ourselves and like James say in our second reading you must never treat people in different ways*). But then He was amazed by the depth of her faith! Jesus had tested her faith with hard words and her faith had risen to the challenge! Her faith exceeded that of the people he had come to save! Here was a Gentile that had more faith than the Jewish scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees and priests.

Jesus rewarded her faith by giving her exactly what she asked for; He healed her daughter! Her faith was so strong that she didn't ask for proof, but she took Jesus

at His word and turned around and went home to her family and found the demon gone and her daughter healed.

This woman serves as an example of persistent prayer that refuses to be discouraged when prayer is not immediately answered. She provides us with a model for engaging God fully and passionately in prayer. She is an example that Jesus is our only hope during this troubling times.

CONCLUSION

My dear friends whatever obstacles, problems and challenges are you facing today? Persist in seeking the Lord and in His time, you will see every barrier fall! He is our hope

"Hope is willing to leave unanswered questions unanswered and unknown futures unknown. Hope makes you see God's guiding hand not only in the gentle and pleasant moments but also in the shadows of disappointment and darkness." ~ Henri Nouwen