

Our Saviour Lutheran Church
February 24, 2013

COURAGE TO CRY

PRAYER: Dear Lord, how are we afflicted by things seen and unseen yet we are fearful to speak even to You. Who will confront the spiritual realities of our time? Who has the courage to cry? Today, enable us to behold this Syro-Phoenician woman! Behold how she has the courage to cry! She does not give up. Even in the face of silence from her Lord she will not be quiet! Greater wonder still how in the face of our Lord's plainspoken truth concerning her unworthiness she does not give up hope. She begs. She pleads. She prays. She is rewarded. Her daughter is healed. May we likewise be enflamed with courage to cry. Amen.

We can't help but become overwrought with the plight of youth in our midst. For some reason or other we have convinced ourselves that those people aren't really part of us. So this week I took a compass and map and determined that within a few mile radius of the church 17 hand guns were recovered and Jamestown Crescent where one of the gun play incidents took place is just 2 km. away from the church as the crow flies. Just when this story was breaking I was listening to another of a man cruelly nicknamed "Porkchop" now adult, telling of how as a teenager who was bullied continues to suffer the consequences even in adulthood. The issues afflicting youth are legion.

Gangs, drugs, bullying, obesity... the list goes on. Tell me. What are the real underlying issues?

Public officials like Police Superintendent Tavnors and Chief Bill Blair were getting close in identifying the real problems. I admired their candour. The "values of our youth" they lamented, are so totally corrupted that they think nothing and feel nothing in taking a life. We call on the community to help.

Will the community of faith speak? The Church can take some leadership to speak deeper. It takes the Church to speak of the underlying spiritual forces taking control over values. It takes a forthright preaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the one who said, "The Son of Man appeared for this purpose, that he might destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3:8).

Yet, despite all the talk of the demonic, even on a Sunday by Sunday basis with the Lord's Prayer "Deliver us from evil or as in some texts "the Evil One" or even the last week's reading about the Temptation of Christ where Satan is adversary #1 not only in the wilderness Temptation narrative but also from the beginning of the Word in Genesis, we often get squeamish about it all. We'll talk about it, reluctantly allow for it, but please don't say too much. Don't talk about or pray about "our old evil foe" even as we might allow some anachronistic phrase in as we sing about him.

The disciples travelling with Jesus weren't too comfortable hearing all about this woman's demon possessed daughter either. Perhaps like the disciples hearing the woman's frantic pleas we get all uncomfortable and say with them, "Send her away, for she cries after us". We share their sin. May we heed the Lenten call to repent of it.

This woman to her credit, was not dissuaded.

By nature, she shouldn't be speaking in such forthright spiritual terms. This woman was by birth a Canaanite, and a Syro-Phoenician; by position a Roman subject; by culture and language a Greek. She's heathen to the third degree. What does she know about angels and demons, spiritual forces in heavenly realms or the King of All to whom every knee should bow?

Be prepared to be surprised by what all people surrounding us might know about the faith. I'm certain that this Syro-Phoenician woman surprised our Lord. She knows the essentials. And she has all the right words.

Have mercy on me. Perhaps one of the things that strikes the first time visitor to Lutheran Worship is this phrase "Lord, have mercy". Some orders of the service soften its stark penitential nature with music but the Kyrie is always there. Even after we've confessed our sins and received absolution we continually do cry "Lord, have mercy. Even after the sermon where the focus is on the work of Christ for our salvation we often conclude each petition with "Lord, have mercy".

The kyrie is there with good reason. It's the all prevailing Christian attitude which is to permeate the whole of our lives. "Lord, have mercy". Even as Luther identified it as number 1 of the 95 Theses.

1. Our Lord and Master Jesus Christ, when He said "Repent!", willed that the whole life of believers should be one of repentance.

The woman had heeded our Lord's call to repent. Do we? Do we acknowledge the depth of our helplessness and our sinfulness.

She knows that there is only One from whom help might come. Have mercy on me, **O Lord, Son of David.**

While our first stop in the time of crisis is to our friends, maybe even our Facebook friends and to the teacher and to the doctor and to the public officials of all kinds this woman goes straight to the one who can save "O Lord, Son of David.

As an honest Canaanite she knows the power the children of Israel possessed under King David. More importantly she knows the power of this people under their God. Her attitude reminds

me of another Canaanite from another time and generation quoted from the book of Judith we had studied a few weeks back. Remember Achior's report? Holofernes the Assyrian General was getting ready to attack the Israelites and he gathered information and quizzed the Ammorite/Canaanite leader Achior concerning this seemingly foolish people who wouldn't acknowledge the reality of numbers and the futility of their resistance to him, the Emperor and an Empire. Remember Achior's report?

After giving a great summary of the Strength of God's people in faith he gives the bottom line. "Let my Lord pass them by; for their Lord will defend them, and their God will protect them, and we shall be put to shame before all the earth".

Holofernes, of course, doesn't listen, and is finally done in by a heroine, Judith wielding a sword. Holofernes loses his head proving Achior's report true. The Lord is with His people. Judith knew the strength of King David and greater King and Kingdom he foreshadows. Likewise, this Syro-Phoenician woman shared the wisdom.

Well, that history is for us also. May we repent of our ignorance of it. Are we not members of the Church, the fulfilment of Israel so that we possess the title "New Israel"? As we contemplate the strength of inheritance from Israel, her King, the fulfilment in the one and true "Son of David" may we also learn to call on Him in our time of need.

Behold her persistence! Behold her humility! Behold her faith! She calls it as it is.

"Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon (Matthew 15:22)".

And then, silence.

We are not told why. The Lord does not need to answer our whys. It is sufficient for us to know that God has his own timing and it is our task to wait patiently. Perhaps it is to show the disciples what deep rooted faith might do. She waits on the Lord in continued sustained prayer.

She isn't the first nor the last who must wait. In such times join in the prayerbook of the church contained in the psalms and recite how we might be prepared to wait upon the Lord.

Still waiting is not idleness. It is an active prayer.

Our Lord calls things as they are. We need to be prepared for that also. He tells her that she is not part of Israel. She is "one of the dogs". Now some translators have seen fit to soften Jesus' words a bit so that our Lord's words read "little dogs" but whatever way you say it being a dog, even a wee cute pet dog isn't all that charitable.

But Jesus is in the business of saving souls and not stroking our ego. Truth be told is that she is outside the community of faith. When you outside of Israel or now New Israel which is the

Church you dwell outside of where the Word and sacraments are freely offered. In a real sense you are in deep waters without salvation.

The Holy Spirit is with her so she acknowledges her unworthiness. Do we? How sincere is our confession as “poor miserable sinners”?

Her daughter is healed. A home is restored. A woman had courage to cry forth for help in humility and faith from the the only One who can truly save. May we all model her actions doing likewise. May we lead others to do the same.

Amen.