

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

Early this year on a Wednesday during Lent, Bob and Judy gave me a coaster that reads "Jesus loves you but I'm his favorite". I showed it to several people that evening, including one of our confirmation students who told me I should give her the coaster because she was Jesus' favorite. I said "no, I've always been his favorite", she looked at me and said "out with the old in with the new", I said "I'm going to remember that when you're confirmed" and she replied "no you won't, you'll have forgotten by then".

So does God have favorites? Does he have a chosen people? Let's talk about this for a moment or two. As I read this, studied it, and thought about it, I thought of God's call to Abram, whom God named Abraham. In Hebrew, Abraham means "father of people", with his obedience to God, his trust and belief in God credited to him as righteousness. (Gen 15:6) God made a covenant with Abraham that Abraham's descendants would be "like the dust of the earth, so that if anyone could count the dust, then your offspring would be counted." (Gen 13:16) Then the Apostle Paul tells us in his letter to the Galatians that "God would justify the Gentiles by faith," and told Abraham that all nations would be blessed through him, "so those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith." (Gal 3:8)

So now let's go back to our gospel reading for this morning. We have a Canaanite woman pleading with Jesus to help her by healing her daughter. She's not looking for something for herself, but for her daughter. The disciples want Jesus to send her away, she's shouting after them. Now judging by what Jesus then says "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel," I suspect that what the disciples wanted Jesus to do was heal the woman's daughter so the woman would quit following them, shouting after them, because Jesus isn't saying that to the woman, but to the disciples.

But then the woman comes and kneels before Jesus, saying "Lord, help me." Now Jesus answers her with what seems harsh in our ears. But is it actually harsh? Keep in mind we don't know his expression or the tone of his voice. He answers her not with a literal statement but with a parable or proverbial statement. "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." He's not calling her a dog, he's actually telling her that his work is with his own people, the lost sheep of the house of Israel, lost in the sense of spiritually astray, where traditions keep the people from obeying God.

So what does she do? She agrees, she knows she is not an Israelite, that she has no claim to belong to the chosen people of God, the historic Jewish people. But her answer draws the inference that even household dogs, pets, have their place in the family, she tells Jesus that "even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table." A Gentile woman, a Canaanite knows in some way that the mercy of God is so great that even the tiniest bit is sufficient for her needs. She has faith, like the Centurion who tells Jesus to just say the word and his servant will be healed, she has

faith, great faith. Faith that is a gift from God, a precursor, a foreshadowing if you will, to the faith that you and I have received from God. God's mercy extends to all, he responds to her "Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish."

Now keep in mind brothers and sisters, that this is not telling us that if our faith is great enough we won't have problems, illnesses, afflictions, and the like. Nor is this story telling us that if we have problems, illnesses, afflictions and the like, that it is because our faith is deficient.

No, this is a story about grace through faith, faith in a person where we, and the disciples with Jesus, didn't expect to see it. Faith like this only comes from God, it's not from some intellectual effort on the part of this woman, or for that matter, on the part of anyone else.

So does God have a chosen people? Yes, those who are spiritual descendants of Abraham, that includes you and me, saved by grace through faith, fed by Word and Sacrament, people of the new covenant in Jesus Christ. Our sins forgiven, justified by faith, sent to share the Good News of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, forgiven, justified and loved by God. That's us, you and me! AMEN