

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

Does God have favorites, a chosen people? Think now of God's call to Abram, whom God named Abraham. In Hebrew, Abraham means "father of people", his obedience, trust and faith in God credited to him as righteousness. God made a covenant with Abraham that his descendants would be "like the dust of the earth, so that if anyone could count the dust, then your offspring would be counted." The Apostle Paul tells us in his letter to the Galatians that "God would justify the Gentiles by faith," and God told Abraham that all nations would be blessed through him, "so those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith."

This morning we have a Canaanite woman pleading with Jesus to heal her daughter. She's pleading not herself, but for her daughter. The disciples want her sent away, she's shouting after them. Jesus then says "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel," after all, this woman deserves nothing, she's owed nothing, worthy of nothing.

But then the woman comes, kneels and says "Lord, help me." Now Jesus' answer surprises us. But should it? We weren't there, we don't know his expression or tone of his voice. He answers her with a proverbial statement. "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." She's not being called a dog, Jesus is saying his work is with his own people, the lost sheep of the house of Israel, lost in the sense of spiritually astray, where traditions get in the way of obedience to God. !

She agrees, she's not an Israelite, she has no claim as one of the chosen people of God, the historic Jewish people. But her answer tells us that even household pets have a place in the family, "even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table." She's not owed any mercy but she is confident 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 foreshadowing 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 my friends, keep in mind that this is not telling us that if only our faith is great enough we won't be afflicted with illnesses and the like. And especially note that his story isn't telling us that if we have problems, illnesses, afflictions and the like, that our faith is insufficient.

This brothers and sisters 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 that only comes from God, not because of some effort on the part of this woman, or on the part of anyone else. Faith shown on the part of this Canaanite woman, and previously on the part of a Roman centurion. Two Gentiles justified by faith.

God's chosen people are the spiritual descendants of Abraham, including you and me, saved by grace through faith, fed by Word of God and the Sacraments, 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