

Pastor T.C. Arnold
2nd Sunday in Lent
Genesis 32 & Matthew 15
February 24th, 2013

The man wrestling with Jacob said, *“Let me go for the day is broken.”* But Jacob said in return, *“I will not let you go unless you bless me.”* To that the man (who was, strangely enough, God Himself) changed Jacob’s name to Israel and the God blessed him. The Lord called Jacob, “God’s fighter” for he had struggled with God and with men and won.

Not so much different is the situation presented in the Gospel text from Matthew chapter fifteen. A Canaanite woman pleads for her daughter and the Lord puts up a fight. *“I was sent only the lost sheep of Israel.”* You know, that’s Jacob’s offspring – the one who strove with God – God’s fighter. Is the Canaanite woman going to be a “God’s fighter” too? You bet she is. She responds, “Even the dogs get the master’s crumbs. Isn’t there anything left for the dogs?” She struggles with the Lord – grabbing on to Him by faith – and not letting go until He blesses her.

So different are these two stories – so far apart in the span of history – but look at how similar in the way the Canaanite woman and Jacob would hold on to their Lord and not let go. Jacob with a “death grip” of a wrestling move and the Canaanite woman with her persistent faith. Beloved, this is going to sound a bit hokey or cliché but be like Jacob. Grab on tight to your Lord and don’t let go. Grab on until He blesses you – and He surely will. This is going to sound hokey or cliché, but be like the Canaanite woman. Call out to God in prayer that you belong at that table next to the Lord. Not because you are so worthy or righteous... you’re not... none of us are. But because Jesus has come with crumbs from his table filled with blessings that are for those who have faith.

Don’t let go. Keep and feed that persistent faith. I say don’t let go and keep and feed that persistent faith because I know how easy it is for God’s people to become lackadaisical with our life in Christ. It’s easy for us to think that Church on Sunday morning is just too much trouble and of no real benefit. It’s easy for us to make the difficult tasks before us our top priority (and that seems to make sense) or even the pleasurable activities more important than the fellowship of Christians and the gifts that God has given to us in His precious sacraments. It’s easy for us to stay in bed or talk ourselves into the idea that we don’t “need” church because we can get God anywhere. Our sins lie to us and tell us that a struggle that lasts all night until the Lord blesses Jacob or a persistent faith like the Canaanite woman is just too much trouble in a world that has enough troubles as it is.

Beloved in the Lord, don’t let the world lie to you – telling you that what you are hearing, reading in God’s Word, receiving by mouth at Holy Communion, receiving by water and the Word at Baptism is not that important. Don’t give in to a society that says, “If it’s broke... if it doesn’t seem useful... if I’m not feeling any pleasure... if I’m bored with it... then, get rid of it.” This world’s understanding of what is good, right and salutary for you is way off base. The world says that if it’s not a healthy diet or a P90X workout... if it’s not an activity to promote brain function or insurance on your vehicle, home or all your kitchen appliances, then it just may not really be all that good.

That’s a lie. The world does not understand how good it is for us, any of us, to hold on to the Lord when the world lets us down – to struggle and be called God’s fighter – when life overwhelms. The world doesn’t understand the value of a persistent faith that seeks out the

company of the faithful even when the worst of times are upon us – even when it seems some sort of futile exercise. The world doesn't understand, and sometimes we forget, how we are not made to be lone rangers playing this game called life. Rather, we have been called in the one true faith to share our burdens with one another – lest we forget that our fellow Christians desire to help us with what is so difficult for us to carry and we need our fellow Christians to help carry our heavy load.

Of course the heaviest load that presses upon our hearts and our conscience is sin. Who will carry that load? You know who – and for that reason we are here and there is no better place to be. When we come through those doors we are stepping into the place where God meets His precious children in a very intimate way. He comes to us in this place to shoulder all our burdens of sin for you. Here is where you are met by a Lord who does not expect you to do it alone – who knows you cannot do it alone – who has done it for you – all of it. All of your sins are forgiven.

Beloved, in this forgiveness that you surely have today and every day, come to the Lord in prayer and thanksgiving. Come to Him as a “God's fighter” in persistence. In other words, don't let your God off the hook. Hold on to Him in your struggles and with your prayers and say, “I'm going to hold on to you until you bless me. There is no way I'm letting go.”

Persist with your Lord in your prayers like the Canaanite woman. There are days we feel like dogs – we even perhaps feel as if God is calling out to us from heaven like He did with His very own mouth in the Gospel text for today, “*It's not right to throw food meant for children out to the dogs.*” As sinners we deserve nothing from our Lord – we are dogs who deserve nothing good. But here is the prayer of the Canaanite woman that is our prayer too. She says, “Then if I am a dog then at least afford me the privilege of what the dogs get. That's all I ask. I accept my position, so only give me the scraps.”

The Canaanite woman and, for that matter, Jacob were struggling, persistent and not letting go of their Messiah. He is the Messiah of both Israel and the Gentiles. He came for Christians who persist in the faith that God grants. Blessed scraps are all we need – but we have been privileged to have the whole feast. You have more than enough in a Christ Jesus to whom we remain faithful.

Remember, beloved in the Lord, this Lenten-tide is a journey. It's a journey with our Lord in faith all the way to the cross. Some days you will be like Peter, saying you will never forsake Him and yet ready to deny at the first sign of distress. Some days you will be like Thomas needing to see proof with his own eyes. The journey you take during Lent to Calvary's cross is a journey in a persistent faith that holds on to a Savior who promises to bless you. The journey gets more and more difficult, but will eventually see a blessed end. Or, should we say, a blessed beginning in new Life.

You are blessed, beloved in the Lord. In the faith that persists with you each of your days. God's fighter endures and fights the good fight. You have too, at times. You have no other choice. It's a struggle out there. But the Lord you cling to blesses you. He gives you what you need to be God's fighter. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.