

The title for today's message is: **Encouragement, In Faith.**

Jesus said: **"I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."**

Grace and peace to you from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.
Amen.

A young man went to a counselor one day because he was dealing with feelings of failure, as well as inadequacy.

He told the counselor that he wanted to go to college, but he felt as if there were too many strikes already against him.

After sharing his hopes, as well as his hurts, he waited for some positive words of wisdom from the counselor, yet those words never came.

Instead of hearing positive plans of action from the counselor, he heard nothing but words of discouragement.

First the counselor pointed out that college was just too expensive these days, besides your grades aren't good enough for college.

He continued to say, most likely you would probably drop out within the first year anyway. College just isn't for you.

And finally, as if that wasn't enough, the counselor said, "You would be better off finding something else to do with your life." Wow!

If you think that story is shocking, what if I told you that Jesus did the same kind of thing, yet in a different context. Would you be surprised to hear that?

Now, in Matthew chapter 15 we have a record of Jesus acting in a manner that were not used to hearing.

Look, when we see a person hurting, mentally or physically, we try to comfort them, by reminding them of how much Jesus loves them.

We say things like, “Jesus promised you that He would never leave you nor forsake you”.

And we remind those that are hurting to cast off their pain giving it to Jesus as He gives back His peace.

What we don't usually say to people who are hurting and feeling alone is that, Jesus might not answer you right away.

Can you imagine what a Christian ministry would be like, if the pastor totally ignored your request for help?

You walk into his office with a great burden on your shoulders, and no matter how many times you ask for help, he only gives you reasons to give up and walk away.

Now, this is exactly what the world would have expected the Canaanite woman to do. Just simply walk away!

If you remember, she came to Jesus with a desperate request. And a very needy one at that.

Her request was not a selfish one either, it wasn't even for her, but for her daughter who was demon possessed at the time.

The pain, anguish and hope that was in the mothers voice could be compared to any mother pleading for the life of her child.

Yet she was met with enough discouragement to cause her to give up and leave, never understanding Jesus at all.

And what's hard to accept is that Jesus allowed her to be attacked with discouragement at least four times on the day that she sought His help.

The first attack we've already touched upon. Jesus was silent upon hearing her request. Matthew said: ***But he (meaning Jesus) did not answer her a word.***

So what do you think was running through the Canaanite woman's mind after such a rebuke?

Could she have begun entertaining the possibility that Jesus did not want to help her? Of course that is possible!

The silence of Jesus here in the pages of Matthew have been magnified a thousand fold in the minds of hurting Christians everywhere.

When answers don't come, especially when we expect them, it's easy enough to just lose hope and give up.

Yet this woman didn't give up, did she. And how do you suppose she was able to stand her ground with all the discouragement thrown her way?

Was it because she happened to be a strong willed woman? Or do you suppose her faith had something to do with it?

It certainly was her faith, Jesus told her as much, He said: ***“O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire.”***

Now, its important to keep that in mind, as we move on to the other moments of discouragement that came her way.

Now her second discouragement came not from Jesus, but from His disciples! They said, ***“Send her away, for she is crying out after us.”***

Translated in modern language today, they were saying “She is a real pain in the neck, so we need to get rid of her.

And to make matters worse, Jesus didn’t rebuke His disciples for being so cutting and selfish.

And it is Satan himself who tries to make us all feel as if we were bothering Jesus especially when we pray over and over again.

And its true, many times Jesus allows Satan to keep on speaking in our ear the same discouragement as that of His disciples.

The third discouragement came when Jesus said: ***“I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”***

In other words He was saying, sorry but, your not my focus!’ And then the fourth and final discouragement came when Jesus calls her a dog That’s right a dog.

So ask yourself, where do you see any encouragement from Jesus in the first six verses of our text?

And are you able to recognize or see that Jesus is actually trying to strengthen this woman’s faith through it all?

Now this question, being prevalent among many a Christian, is probably why God recorded this story in the Bible in the first place.

Look. its often difficult for us to recognize that discouragement can actually be a way for Jesus to strengthen our faith.

Now, were also reminded that God's discipline over us, isn't to punish us, but rather its to show His great love for us.

And the same is true, when God allows discouragement to come our way. Although Satan tries to suggest, that we are on the outs with God.

And that its because of that, were having so many problems in our life. Yet as for Jesus, He tells us the opposite is true.

Again look at how the Canaanite woman reacted to all these discouraging words and actions.

When Jesus ignored her, and likened her to a dog, she could have said something like.

“Now wait a minute, aren't you supposed to be a man of love, and mercy, yet here You treat me, a humble women who has a genuine need, with such disrespect....

But, instead of acting that way, she remained humbled, and persistent in prayer saying.

“Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table.”

In other words, she was willing, and ready to receive whatever crumbs Jesus tossed her way.

Look she knew for certain that even those crumbs were more than enough to fulfill her request.

And its clear she was able to break through the discouraging words that came her way, because of one simple truth.

She trusted in all the things that she heard about Jesus. She knew Him to be the Messiah, she even called Him the Son of David.

She knew that He had the power to heal her daughter and she rested her hopes on all that she heard about Jesus. Yes she had great faith.

That's why Jesus eventually said: ***“O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire.”***

Dear friends in Christ, God has given us a very special gift, when he gave us the Holy Spirit.

And because of this gift, we're able to believe in things we have not yet seen. And we believe without a doubt, that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

We believe that He was born of a virgin, and suffered under Pontius Pilate and that on the third day, He rose again from the dead.

We believe that with His resurrection came victory, complete assurance that Jesus will always have the best intentions for our spiritual care.

What all this comes down to is faith. A faith that is not something hoped for, or something that we earn. It's a gift given to us through Word and Sacrament.

It's God's way of guiding us in our Christian walk, and giving us hope in times of trouble.

Faith which brings encouragement as we rest our hope and our needs upon the promises given to us by Jesus Christ Himself.

And this is not a difficult task, we actually apply this great faith everyday when we fall down on our knees before our Lord and savior.

Confessing our sins, and recalling His promises of mercy and forgiveness, and each time we stand up, we stand forgiven.

Therefore, the next time we seek answers from God and instead, we find discouragement standing in our way.

Remember what Jesus has shown us today. That faith will find encouragement in Jesus Christ. Something good to think about!

Amen.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy spirit be with us forever. Amen.