

Daily Prayer

Feria

Wednesday, August 4, 2021

We enter into a time of quiet. We offer to God our selves and in the silence know that God embraces us as God's very own. We offer our hopes and our concerns through our prayers and in the silence listen for God. Today we hold in our prayers the ordinary moments in life—the trials and the joys.

We begin by saying

Open our lips, O Lord;
and our mouth shall proclaim our praise.

The First Reading

The LORD said to Moses, 'Send men to spy out the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the Israelites; from each of their ancestral tribes you shall send a man, every one a leader among them.'

At the end of forty days they returned from spying out the land. And they came to Moses and Aaron and to all the congregation of the Israelites in the wilderness of Paran, at Kadesh; they brought back word to them and to all the congregation, and showed them the fruit of the land. And they told him, 'We came to the land to which you sent us; it flows with milk and honey, and this is its fruit. Yet the people who live in the land are strong, and the towns are fortified and very large; and besides, we saw the descendants of Anak there. The Amalekites live in the land of the Negeb; the Hittites, the Jebusites, and the Amorites live in the hill country; and the Canaanites live by the sea, and along the Jordan.'

But Caleb quieted the people before Moses, and said, 'Let us go up at once and occupy it, for we are well able to overcome it.' Then the men who had gone up with him said, 'We are not able to go up

against this people, for they are stronger than we are.' So they brought to the Israelites an unfavourable report of the land that they had spied out, saying, 'The land that we have gone through as spies is a land that devours its inhabitants; and all the people that we saw in it are of great size. There we saw the Nephilim (the Anakites come from the Nephilim); and to ourselves we seemed like grasshoppers, and so we seemed to them.'

Then all the congregation raised a loud cry, and the people wept that night.

And the LORD spoke to Moses and to Aaron, saying: How long shall this wicked congregation complain against me? I have heard the complaints of the Israelites, which they complain against me. Say to them, 'As I live', says the LORD, 'I will do to you the very things I heard you say: your dead bodies shall fall in this very wilderness; and of all your number, included in the census, from twenty years old and upwards, who have complained against me, not one of you shall come into the land in which I swore to settle you, except Caleb son of Jephunneh and Joshua son of Nun. But your little ones, who you said would become booty, I will bring in, and they shall know the land that you have despised. But as for you, your dead bodies shall fall in this wilderness. And your children shall be shepherds in the wilderness for forty years, and shall suffer for your faithlessness, until the last of your dead bodies lies in the wilderness. According to the number of the days in which you spied out the land, forty days, for every day a year, you shall bear your iniquity, forty years, and you shall know my displeasure.' I the LORD have spoken; surely I will do thus to all this wicked congregation gathered together against me: in this wilderness they shall come to a full end, and there they shall die.

Numbers 13.1-2, 25-14.1, 26-35

The Psalm

We have sinned as our forebears did; *
we have done wrong and dealt wickedly.

In Egypt they did not consider your marvellous works,
nor remember the abundance of your love; *
they defied the Most High at the Red Sea.

But he saved them for his name's sake, *
to make his power known.

He rebuked the Red Sea, and it dried up, *
and he led them through the deep as through a desert.

He saved them from the hand of those who hated them *
and redeemed them from the hand of the enemy.

The waters covered their oppressors; *
not one of them was left.

Then they believed his words *
and sang him songs of praise.

But they soon forgot his deeds *
and did not wait for his counsel.

A craving seized them in the wilderness, *
and they put God to the test in the desert.

They forgot God their saviour, *
who had done great things in Egypt,

Wonderful deeds in the land of Ham, *
and fearful things at the Red Sea.

So he would have destroyed them,
had not Moses his chosen stood before him in the breach, *
to turn away his wrath from consuming them.

The Gospel Reading

Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, 'Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon.' But he did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, 'Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us.' He answered, 'I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.' But she came and knelt before him, saying, 'Lord, help me.' He answered, 'It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs.' She said, 'Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table.' Then Jesus answered her, 'Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.' And her daughter was healed instantly.

Matthew 15.21-28

We continue with the reflection that follows. In silence, we ask what the reading has to say to us today. Is there something in the reflection that draws us more deeply into the reading? What does God have to say to us? What do we have to ask God?

The Reflection

Nate Wall

*Well, I won't back down
No, I won't back down
You can stand me up at the gates of hell
But I won't back down.*

- Tom Petty

Israel's Bible never ran short on stories of brash faith. Rebekah marries blindly into an upstart God's promise on hearsay (Gen 24:42–67). Midwives Shiphrah and Puah stonewall Pharaoh's genocidal policy on principle (Exod 1:15–22). Sex-worker Rahab sabotages her city's defences after hearing rumours of the Exodus (Josh 2:8–14). Widow Ruth stalks her crestfallen mother-in-law back to Bethlehem

simply because love doesn't quit (Ruth 1:15–18). And how many Psalmists knock on God's door and say things like, "Lord, every day I call to you and stretch out my hands in prayer" (Ps 88:9)?

Faith—Old Testament faith—isn't the opiate of the people. It's the jaws of a bulldog.

So just watch this Canaanite woman hound Jesus. Good God, she *will not* let go. Jesus—the Jewish prophet laser-focused on his vocation—attempts triage. But turning a deaf ear fails; using his disciples as bouncers proves useless. Now she's sprawled at his feet, so Jesus addresses her directly. All he gives is an inch: the blunt rationale of why-he-won't-help. But somehow she takes home a mile of blessing. Her demon-addled daughter is ok. And her ears ring with Jesus' words, "Great is your faith!"—or put a little less stiffly, "That's some monster trust you've got there."

How does this happen? Because she outwits Jesus. "Kids eat first, then the dogs," he explains. And in fairness to Jesus, the God of Israel was seriously *on the hook* for centuries of exile. At that moment, Israel had languished *generations* waiting for their LORD to make good on a promise or seven. So the priorities are clear. However shocking Jesus' rationale may be to *our* sensibilities, it is sound. But it doesn't matter. Because *this woman weaponizes his analogy against him*. "Fair enough. I'm a Gentile dog, and you're all still at the table. Kids are pretty messy eaters, though—so where exactly are the crumbs?"

Now, *that's* prayer—brash faith kind of prayer. Do we *dare* pray like that? Sure, get us desperate enough and every now and then we'll tread nearly as far as the Canaanite woman does here. Usually, though? We hedge. "Prayer doesn't change God, it changes us," we say, sensibly. (Or is it just safely?) After all, many of us who've begged God for something know what it's like give up holding our

breath. Disappointment *hurts*. Sometimes it disorients and disillusion. At which point we either give up on God, or we launch our disappointment, disorientation and disillusionment back toward the ceiling as *prayer*. Which is to say: we pierce the silence, bum-rush God's bouncers, claw at his feet, and throw his own words back at him with a twist.

That's not just what Gentile dogs like me do under the table; it's what God's *kids* do too. John Donne, the 17th century poet-preacher put it like this once:

The children of God know how to resolve and make liquid all his Actions. They can spy out and extract Balms and Oils from his Vinegars; and supple and cure with his corrosives. Be he what he will, they will make him Merciful.

"They will *make him Merciful*." Like the Canaanite woman, people of brash faith *gamble* on the alchemy of real back-and-forth prayer. Say God speaks poison; they'll distill medicine from it, the way the Canaanite woman does. Why? Because they trust they're dealing with the Living God and, like the Canaanite woman, God's children have heard the impossibly beautiful rumour that his true name is Mercy, all the way down. So they're not backing down without a fight.

Honestly, it would be easier to back down. Who can blame you for looking at the "gates of hell" and thinking, "Yeah, maybe I'll just go home"? But if the story of Israel's aborted entry into the Land of Milk and Honey warns us about anything, it's that *fear won't keep us safe*. Playing it safe is a losing game.

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Not long after the Canaanite woman outwitted Jesus, he faced down his Father's stony silence one night outside Jerusalem. All the odds were against Jesus too. Everything said, "Turn back."

Instead, he put all of Israel—and all the doubters like me—on his back, and Jesus linked arms with the brash Canaanite woman, and held onto Mercy for dear life while the jaws of Death swallowed him.

The bulldog's jaws were stronger.

When the time is right, we conclude our time of silence with the canticle

The Canticle ~ A Song of the Word of the Lord

*Return to the Lord, who will have mercy,
to our God, who will richly pardon.*

Seek the Lord while he may be found, ♦
call upon him while he is near;

Let the wicked abandon their ways, ♦
and the unrighteous their thoughts;

Return to the Lord, who will have mercy; ♦
to our God, who will richly pardon.

'For my thoughts are not your thoughts, ♦
neither are your ways my ways,' says the Lord.

'For as the heavens are higher than the earth, ♦
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts.

'As the rain and the snow come down from above, ♦
and return not again but water the earth,

'Bringing forth life and giving growth, ♦
seed for sowing and bread to eat,

'So is my word that goes forth from my mouth; ♦
it will not return to me fruitless,

'But it will accomplish that which I purpose, ♦
and succeed in the task I gave it.'

*Glory to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning is now
and shall be for ever. Amen.*

*Return to the Lord, who will have mercy,
to our God, who will richly pardon.*

Isaiah 55.6-11

*We continue in prayer for those people and situations that we hold up before God (The Intercessions)
and continue with the concluding collect, the Lord's prayer and the closing sentences.*

The Intercessions

Let us give thanks to God,
the God of all peoples of the earth.
For the colour and forms of your creation
and our place within it,
we bring our thanks, good Lord:
your mercy endures for ever.

For our daily food,
and for those whose work and skill
bring your good gifts to us,
we bring our thanks, good Lord:
your mercy endures for ever.

For the gifts and graces inspired in human minds and hearts;
for insight and imagination,
for the skills of research
which bring healing and fulfilment to the lives of many;
we bring our thanks, good Lord:
your mercy endures for ever.

For the light and shades of the changing seasons,
and their variety and dependability;
for new life and growth out of barrenness and decay;
we bring our thanks, good Lord:

your mercy endures for ever.

For new hope and strength in our communities,
especially in your Church and among all you call to serve you,
we bring our thanks, good Lord;

your mercy endures for ever.

For all in whose lives we see
goodness, kindness, gentleness, patience and humility,
and all the fruit of the Spirit,
we bring our thanks, good Lord:

your mercy endures for ever.

For the life we have been given,
and for all those whom you have given us to share it,
we bring our thanks, good Lord:

your mercy endures for ever.

Our prayers conclude

Lord God,
your Son Jesus Christ came to make all things new.
Refresh us by the power of your Spirit,
that through the stillness of prayer
and the energy of service
we may discover afresh your call on our lives
and your unconditional love for our selves,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

[let us pray as our Saviour taught us,]

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins,
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial,
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours,
now and for ever. Amen

We conclude

May God grant to the world justice, truth and peace.
Amen.

Credits:

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