

“Taking the Gospel for Granted?”

Matthew 15:21–28 *Penecost11A 8-20-17*

Tomorrow around noon 70% of our sun will be hidden by a solar eclipse. Imagine if that sun were to be totally blocked out, not just for few minutes, but permanently. The sun that we take for granted would fail to give off the warmth and light and benefits to plant life that we have all depended on. With such a limited exposure to the sun, life would be difficult. Just ask those living in far north what their winter is like.

Now consider the desperation of the Canaanite woman whose daughter was possessed by a demon. The intervention of the only person she believed could deliver her was eclipsed by his temporary disregard for her needs. While we take for granted God’s goodness, evident in our readiness to pray for everything, she could not. For she was a woman from the same race looked down upon by the Israelites. Abraham swore that his son would never marry a Canaanite woman. She could not take for granted the mercy of God by reason of her ethnic standing.

Jesus made it clear to her that he was not there to minister to the Gentiles. When that did not put her off, but only made her beg more, He answered with that troubling reference to dogs eating from the master’s table, a reference to a household pet. She understands that Jesus is not insulting her humanity, but that the Jews are his first priority.

By faith she also knows what our other readings today make clear: the favored position of the Jews does not exclude the Gentiles from salvation. It was just a matter of what comes first.

She then gives the best answer any Jew or Gentile could ever give. Her answer surpasses all ethnic distinctions and exemplifies the attitude with which anyone should ask anything of Jesus. In general terms her begging said this:

“Lord, I know I am not worthy of any single blessing from you or even that you should listen to me. Though I am not worthy to ask, you are worthy to be asked, for you are gracious and merciful to the downtrodden and those who despair. I come as a sinner seeking salvation. I take nothing for granted, for I deserve nothing. Only you can help. If you do not save me, I am not saved.”

The light of Jesus’ love was no longer eclipsed. She received it all. When we eclipse God’s light by our pride, unrepented sin, or lack of faith we take the Gospel for granted and do not receive His blessing, whether it is an answer to our prayer or something better he gives instead.

The daughter was delivered from the demon. While we may not get everything we want, hers was a request Jesus always grants, for He has taught us to pray, “Deliver us from evil.”

And that brings me to a sub-theme of his story, which connects to our emphasis on Christian education of our children. Teaching our children God’s Word and praying for them helps us to do for them what this mother did for her daughter; what we promised to do for them at their baptism: to renounce the devil and all his works and ways.

His works and ways are not limited to the dramatic head spinning and growling demonic possession depicted in movies. More often the devil worms his way into a child’s heart and mind to first create doubt in God’s Word, then in His existence. His goal is to dull their conscience by repeated and habitual sin, so they will either despair of ever breaking sin’s power, or call evil good and embrace it as an alternate truth.

Satan doesn’t care how he separates our children from God, just as long as he does it, or kills them trying. So if you are a parent that brought your children to be baptized, you came to Jesus saying, Jesus, Son of God, deliver my child from sin and Satan. Then in baptism He answered that prayer.

Now use that baptism and make deliverance from the devil a continuing priority. Every time you read a Bible story to a child, you renounce the devil’s work of deceiving that child with lies. Every time you pray with and for your child, you uproot any seeds of doubts Satan may have sown in your child’s heart. Every time you bring your child to Sunday School and to the Divine Service, you renounce the devil’s accusations and lies with God’s gifts of forgiveness by faith in Christ. When you live out your faith in Christ with consistent integrity, you show that God’s mercy in Christ is real and it matters to you in how you live each day.

We can’t assume that our children will figure it out. God knew that no one can. He took nothing for granted, and left nothing to chance. While we were still in darkness, he sent Jesus, the Light of the World, to show us the way and to be the way to God. He was seen, heard, and touched, by many eye-witnesses.

Then one day, during a total eclipse of the sun, Jesus himself felt the abandonment of His Father as He bore the sin and guilt of the whole world in his pain-wracked, bleeding and dying body on his cross. He endured temporarily what all sinners deserve permanently: separation from God. So that we do not take for granted God’s mercy by failing to repent, behold the forsaken Savior, shut out from God’s mercy in our place.

On Good Friday He died publicly, and public officials sealed up His tomb to confirm His death. On Easter Sunday he left an opened tomb alive, creating a vacancy none can explain. He appeared to over 500 and then in a vision to Paul. Today he appears in visions to people of all nations, for He does not take the acceptance of the Gospel for granted. He desires all to come to Him and live. He left no stone unturned, especially not the one that sealed his tomb, to reveal Himself the one Savior for the whole world. Through water and the Word He gives His Spirit that we might believe. In Communion He keeps us in the faith.

So taking nothing for granted, we humbly call upon God’s mercy for every need of every nation. May He equip us to proclaim His saving work to every age and race of people on earth, beginning with our children. Amen.