Trinity, Herrin Reminscere

## "Afflictions" St. Matthew 15:23

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SERMON 1657

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Our sermon text is from St. Matthew 15:23, "But He answered her not a word. And His disciples came and urged Him, saying, "Send her away, for she cries out after us."

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

You are struggling with your life. You are struggling with personal relationships or the lack of them. You are afflicted with depressing and negative thoughts. The daily grind of work, bills, and raising a family leave you worn out. It may even be the lack of the busy life due to retirement, empty nest or death, that leave you without purpose and motivation for living. This week a 5 year old who formerly attended our Learning Center was buried. Even Heart-breaking events have left you wondering about religion. Your prayers seem lifeless and unanswered. Some of these things may even have you mad at God.

You have spoken with others, but like the friends of Job, their advice doesn't seem to be much help. "You just have to give your life to Jesus." "Stop worrying about those things." Even though they don't say anything, they portray the Christian life as happy and carefree. Everything is fine for them. They wake up praising the Lord for the sunrise and it only gets better from there. You say to yourself, "There must be something wrong with the way I'm doing it." You think that you must be the problem.

And then, when God does not deliver you from your affliction, you say, "My faith must be weak." "I'm not a very good Christian." When God does not answer your prayer, you doubt and think about trying other religious ways that bring results. Everyone else seems to have it altogether. Everyone else is living their best life now. What is wrong?

My dear Christian friends, let me assure you that you are forgiven through faith in Jesus Christ. The Triune God is your refuge and strength. He is your refuge in times of trouble. He has not and will not forsake you. You are a baptized child of God dearly loved by the heavenly Father. You have been given the Holy Spirit, who is working within you to struggle against all that would lead you away from Christ.

Like the television show which presents the perfect family—Leave it to Beaver, The Cosby Show or substitute one of the more recent—we think that our life ought to be like that. Mom ought to wear pearls which vacuuming and every meal is home cooked. The children all hug their parents and before the 30 minutes are up everyone has learned their lesson. That is not real life. In the same way, I tell you, that those who present to you a Christian life which is all honey and roses, either are lying to you, don't know the Christian life, or it is simply the lull before the storm. Give it some time and afflictions will soon batter their Christian ship. I have found that things aren't always the

way that they seem. Those who seem to have it altogether may be the first to fall away, while the one who seemed weak had the deep faith.

We live in a sinful world. Our sinful nature fights against us and we fall into temptation to say and do things which we shouldn't. The world of sinners which we live in, harms us and says hurtful things. They have their own difficulties and problems which get in the way of helping us with our difficulties and problems. The devil is working to confuse our conscience and lead us into false belief, despair and doubt.

I am not saying that you are without sin and everything is fine. What I am saying, is that the Christian life involves hearing the Word of God. You are a sinner. When that Word of God reveals your sin, then confess it. When the Word of God tells you that you are forgiven, believe it and take it to heart. Trust that your God is a loving God who has everything under control. The Christian life is not a walk in the park; it is a struggle.

Fight against temptation. Strive to read the Word of God each day and say your prayers asking God for help. Plan ahead so that you can take advantage of every opportunity to come to church and receive instruction in the Word. Receive Lord's Supper for the strengthening of your faith. Discipline your body and life so that it doesn't get out of control. So quickly can normal life take over and crowd out the Word of God and prayer, the communion of saints and the forgiveness of sins. So quickly we are engulfed in the stuff of this life and don't look forward to eternal life and heavenly things. My Christian friends, that struggle is not a sign of your failure. That struggle does not mean that God has forsaken you. That struggle is the sign of a normal Christian life.

You aren't doing it wrong. That is exactly the way which God works in this life. He works through His Word and sacraments to strengthen your faith. Then with a strengthened faith, you can bear up under all that comes against you. Our Lord doesn't take you out of this life, He helps you to make it through this life. He gives you the crown of life, and then strengthens you so that you make it to the finish life with faith in Jesus Christ. On that final day, you will have the perfect life. On that final day, there will be no struggle. On that final day, you will see clearly and live by sight, not by faith.

But until that time, I urge you, more and more, to continue to hear the Word of God and fight against sin. With God's Word and prayer, struggle to walk in the way of Christ and please God.

What does the Christian life look like? When St. Paul asked the Lord to take away a thorn in his side, the answer was no. The Lord said, "My grace is sufficient for you." That is the Christian life. When the good and gracious Lord determine that His will is best, then we hold onto His Word and continue to fight against that which remains.

Today's Old Testament reading finds Jacob struggling with God's promise. The Lord had promised that He would be Jacob's God and bring him back to this land. Now as Jacob goes back, everything seems to be against him. His brother Easu who is coming out to meet him is probably going to get his revenge. All of this forces Jacob to deal with the one thing that He fears and dreads more that Esau and death. Jacob must face and wrestle with God. Why did God do this to him?

You might expect God to be all love and kisses, but God comes to him as a man who is fighting against him. God is the one who wrestles with Jacob. That's not usually

the image we have of God. Shepherd with His sheep or heavenly Father with His children, but not an opponent to wrestle us. Furthermore, once Jacob is done wrestling with God, He limps away. Yes, God put his hip out of joint.

What? I thought God was supposed to be help in time of trouble. Yes, he was. Jacob went away from his meeting with God forgive of his sins. His name was changed from deceiver to Israel, one who struggles with God. Jacob knew that he had seen God, and thus the place was called Peniel. Jacob had a limp that would forever remind him of that day when god forgave his sin.

Furthermore, God calmed his conscience concerning his sin. God gave him trust in His Word so that He could meet Esau. The trouble hadn't gone away. It wasn't Jacob's will that was done, but God gave him the strength to meet his brother. God gave him the faith to acknowledge his former life of deceptions. God gave him not a victory apart from God, but a health dependence upon God. That is the Christian life.

Today's Holy Gospel presents the Christian life. The Canaanite woman was not born into the Old Testament Church of the Jews. She was brought up in Canaan apart from the Holy Scriptures. Nevertheless, she came to learn of the true God through the Word. Someone told her about the promised Savior who would be the descendant of David. Someone preached to her about the love and mercy of God upon those who have sinned. Someone told her that Jesus could work a miracle and she believed it. I tell you that she was not different from you and I. She believed because of the Word of God.

When she was in time of trouble, she called upon the Lord. She knew that she was a sinner. We never get to the point in which we are comfortable with our Christian life. But we do get quite comfortable with confessing sin when it arises and living in Christ's forgiveness. That means that we never grow out of asking for mercy. Mercy is the cry of the Christian. She cries out, "Make haste to help me, O Lord."

The response of Jesus is silence. Yep, that sounds familiar. There are times when our prayers seem to go nowhere. Does she give up? No! And neither do we. We know from the Word that God is a good and gracious God. We know that God is loving and will bring to us help and good things. No matter what we experience, we have faith that His Word is true.

She cries out again, "Lord, help me." The answer from Jesus, which is not even addressed to her directly, sounds like He won't help. But we know that Jesus doesn't want to send her away. And she based on the Word knows that Jesus loves her. Since he hasn't said no, then she will continue.

She is holding to His Word in faith. When He does answer her, the words sound to everyone around like a rebuke, but her faith clings to those words and finds in them a Gospel promise, that He will help. Yes, Jesus has wrestled with her. But despite her sin, she trusts in the Gospel. Despite the disciples attempt to send her away, she cries out to God in prayers for mercy. Despite her Canaanite upbringing, she trusts in her Savior, a light for revelation to the Gentiles. Despite her affliction, she holds to the Word of God. This is not an unusual instance. This is the Christian life of faith in Jesus.

We are truly little dogs who do not deserve to receive the children's bread. But by faith we know that God will give us mercy. He will hand over the bread of life and more. This morning's Divine Service includes, as it does each Sunday and festival day, the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Do not take it for granted. It is not any less sincere of a gift from your Lord, because of its frequency. Like a daily kiss from a loved

one, we do not cast it aside in disdain, but cherish it. Our God is giving us a sign of His fathomless love. Though he at times seem like a wrestler, he sincerely and faithfully cares about you. Though you may not outwardly seem to need this heavenly manna, He knows what you need. Your Shepherd and your heavenly Father is preparing you for future afflictions. You will need this when the time comes to wrestle.

Jesus tells the woman great is your faith. Only faith can sustain the Christian life. It is a faith that trusts God whether we come away limping or not. It is a faith that continues to cry for mercy. It is a faith that holds to the Word and finds God's Gospel promise to help. The Christian life is not about plenty or want. It is not about sickness or health. The Christian life is about a faith which endures until the gift of eternal is given by sight.