

Lent 2016 (4): True Courage, Luke 22:54-62/Matt 15:21-28 [MothSun BCP](#)

Two very different stories and you might be struggling to make the link – SUMMARY...it is about bravery. Who will we emulate – the mother of great faith, or Peter under pressure?

So let's think about Peter first: which takes us to our first passage where we see Peter denying he knew Jesus – famous story and to be fair to be Peter the other disciples had fled, *only he* sneaks into the temple courtyard. Peter is recognised as one of Jesus' friends. What does he do? – does he show his belief, hope, certainty and faith in Jesus and declare to them what he knew to be true? – NO! 3 times, not once, but 3 times he denies knowing Jesus.

Isn't that sad – but maybe not surprising. Maybe we can sympathise. Can you think in your own life when someone has quizzed you about your beliefs and maybe you have played it down – you've not been totally upfront? Just like Peter, what you and he are happy to do in your own time, on a Sunday with other Christians is very different to what you might do or say when put under scrutiny – when you might hide or downplay your beliefs. Peter in our story doesn't want to be associated with Jesus – why not? Punishment, embarrassment, being set apart from others – is he willing to be defined by his friendship and trust in Jesus – NO! Are you?

Let's contrast Peter with the mother in our story from Canaan in Galilee. Did you know that in the gospels only two people are given the honour of being described as people of 'great faith' – the centurion who wanted his servant healed (Matt 8) and the woman, the mother in our story? Let's find out why....

She was from an ethnic group looked down upon in Jesus' times. Canaanites lived in the land of Israel, but believed in other gods and were therefore thought to be a corrupt group of people. They were enemies of Israel and the Jews, and were seen as a threat to the purity of the Jews.

But Jesus, as he so often did, travelled to this region to reach out to all who were considered to be outsiders, be they the unrespectables, the Samaritans and here an ethnic Canaanite.

When we see how Jesus treats the mother you could think that he is withholding healing from her daughter because of her ethnic group, but this doesn't make sense when you look at how he loved everyone regardless of their background etc. Rather it follows his way of putting stumbling blocks in people's way to test their faith and commitment: for example the rich young ruler.

But what becomes immediately clear is that this woman is not going to give up on her daughter. She is going to pester, she is going to plead, she will do what it takes to get the best for her daughter. The best and only hope she has for daughter is that Jesus heals her. She calls Jesus "Lord, Son of David have mercy on me".

Jesus is silent – what will she do, will she give up or back away in awkwardness or fear? What do you do when Jesus is silent or when you feel he is not responding straight away? This woman knows Jesus is her only hope. She is not going to give up – what about us, are we persistent?

This mother hangs out the standard of her faith, she trumpets it rather than rolling it up and stuffing it in a back pocket like Peter does. Think about the irony of the situation: in Israel, amongst the Jews, God's chosen people, Jesus had been teaching and performing many miraculous signs and yet many did not believe or receive him. But *here* in Gentile territory (where the non Jews lived) he met a woman who was convinced He was the Messiah and He could not discourage her efforts.

She would have had very little experience or access to the Jewish faith and yet the scrap she had convinced her that this Jesus was her only hope and was king and therefore could do something amazing for her daughter.

Maybe in the hardship of seeing her daughter's suffering and not being able to fix things for her, in the distress and pain, that *that* is how her great faith has been forged.

When Jesus pushes her as to why he should heal and uses the term 'dog', which is a traditional Jewish put-down for a Canaanite person, the woman's answer is marvellous: in humility she acknowledges that God's promises apply first to those around the table, God's children – the Jews – who would be given the best food. But then: even the "dogs" eat the crumbs that the children drop. She relates her role to that of a family pet, a dog – not on an equal status to the children, but still allowed to pick up some of the crumbs they drop. She wants some of the limitless mercy and grace of God. And Jesus loves her answer doesn't he: he appreciates her courage, her humility and ultimately, her great faith.

Great faith is, of course, a relative term. This woman's faith was not great because it was stronger or more sincere or mature than the faith of many Jews who believed in Christ, but because it was based on so little. She had no heritage of God's Word, God's blessing, or of His promises. Therefore, because she believed so much relative to so little revelation, Jesus called her faith 'great' (Matt. 15:28).

What about us – we have so many privileges: a church community in which to grow, a country with a heritage of Christian faith, Bibles a plenty, a God waiting and willing to listen and answer us... What will we do with these blessings? Will we allow them to inspire us, spur us on and give us courage to stand up for what we believe, and be persistent in seeking God for ourselves and our community; or will we like Peter, withdraw?

The great news is that Jesus loved Peter still and after his rising again meets with him on the beach and has breakfast where he tells Peter all is forgiven and he can make a fresh go of living for Jesus. So there is always a second chance for us.

And let's remember: for faith to make sense and to have power, it must be placed in a trustworthy place. Faith actually makes sense because we can place ourselves in Jesus' hands, just like the Canaanite woman did. And that faith gives us courage to be his witnesses, wherever we are, whoever we meet.

Finally, on this Mothering Sunday I think it is right that we should be thankful to God for the courage many mothers show, the world over, in the face of difficulties. Where Mothers trust in God and seek him for the best plan in their children's life, and despite obstacles and adversity keep trusting, keep crying out and keep believing in the God who came that all might have life, hope and a future. (PRAY – thanking God for mothers, and then praying for ourselves to have courage.)