

Good morning!

It is truly an honor to be with you this morning and to stand in Father Richard's shoes as one of the four women he asked to preach while he enjoys some much needed vacation time. I'm also glad my dad could be here with us today. I hope you will enjoy my thoughts on today's gospel. Indeed, I tried to follow George Burns' advice on the secret to a good sermon. . . "to have a good beginning and good ending, and to have the two as close together as possible."

In my life, I've had the privilege of knowing many very strong women, many of them in this church -- women who provide for others, protect those they love, and, women, who project their voices in various ways to the world.

Today's gospel reading from Matthew chapter 15 verses 21 through 28 reveals a woman of strong faith whose intelligent reason stands firm against challenges. As a woman of Canaan near the seacoast of Tyre and Sidon, our heroine of today's gospel is a gentile--an outsider--and not "a sheep of the house of Israel." Her status is not unlike many other strong women whose voices have spoken truth in the face of tremendous challenges. One such woman who comes to mind is Sojourner Truth, whose voice, among many other voices, spoke loud and clear against the odds in favor of women's suffrage at the 1851 Ohio Women's Rights Convention. While Sojourner Truth and the woman of Canaan were speaking up for two very different reasons, their status, courage, reasoning, and faith were the same.

This fifteenth chapter of Matthew's gospel recounts Jesus' leaving Jewish territory because his teachings are being rejected by Jewish priests and people. This is Jesus taking his preaching and healing to non-Jewish believers in the seacoast towns of Tyre and Sidon, but when Jesus' disciples encourage him to "send her away. For she crieth after us." He rebuffs the woman of Canaan saying he was sent only "unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel." In spite of his objection, the woman persists and again pleads for his help to rid her daughter of her affliction. However, even then he likens her to "dogs" unworthy to take the "bread" of the children of Israel. Here Jesus himself is challenging her and he is needing to be reminded of what true faith looks like.

And what, you may ask, does True Faith look like?

True faith speaks up against the odds, accepts challenges, and uses the simple wisdom of the intellect. For Sojourner Truth in her famous "Ain't I a woman" speech she shows her true faith when she challenges the male only voting policy with the assertion that it was God and a woman, not a man, who brought Jesus into this world. The true faith of Sojourner Truth's wise simple logic is not unlike the woman of Canaan who points out to Jesus that even "dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master's tables." To which Jesus promptly concedes, pronounces her faith as great, and heals her daughter of her affliction. Thus, showing the quality of mercy and the universality of his message for the whole world.

Indeed, the woman of Canaan proves that faith can move mountains, or at least it can stand firm and flexible against the rejection, incivility, judgment, and despair the world might present to us.

Sometimes even people of faith need to be reminded how to be faithful -- just as the woman of Canaan shows Jesus that he needs to be open, accepting, and compassionate to her plight, so must we, as people of faith, do likewise.

May we seek to avoid despair and doubt in the face of trouble, but rather be faithful, strong, humble, and optimistic like the woman of Canaan. Amen.