

From the Old Testament of the Day: And He said, “Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel;<sup>[a]</sup> for you have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed.” [Genesis 32.28]

From the Holy Gospel: And she said, “Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their masters’ table.” [Matthew 15.27]

**Today’s weekly oasis for faith in the midst of Lent is called Reminiscere:**

**“Remember, O Lord, Thy tender mercies.” It is the call of the helpless ones.**

**I.**

**Actually you hear two calls of the helpless in the texts of the day for this Reminiscere Sunday. You hear it in the Old Testament, where Jacob has special night out under the starry skies. He has been here before, on that first night on the run from the death threat of his brother, Esau. Jacob becomes utterly aware of his aloneness and his helplessness. That night God answers Jacob’s need through the vision of the ladder or staircase coming down from heaven to Jacob, with his hard and stubborn head lying on a rock for a pillow.**

**In today’s Old Testament reading, Jacob, years later, is heading back to his fatherland after long service to his uncle, Laban. Jacob has become painfully aware that he will meet up with Esau in the morning. So, he sends his family and his servants and his flocks in two different directions in order, hopefully, to save them from destruction at hands of angry Esau and his large band of soldiers.**

**And so Jacob is again left alone, and again the Lord comes to Him. And in some real sense, about which we can only offer conjecture, Jacob “wrestles” with God, and Jacob will not let Him go – which really means, God will continue to be present to the call of His chosen sons and daughters. In this sense, Jacob says, “I will not let you go, O Lord, unless you bless me.”**

**Now, what does this mean, “unless you bless me”? Is Jacob stronger than God – No, he isn’t, and neither are you. What**

**Jacob takes hold of is the ear of God, and he fills that ear with constant petitions until God blesses him and his family, awaiting the encounter with a brother who has vowed to kill him.**

**And bless him, God does. He gives Jacob three things. First, He gives Jacob a new name, “Israel,” meaning “struggled with God.” Second, He gives Jacob a damaged hip, as a constant reminder of who he is in relationship to his God. And third, the Lord gives Jacob peace and protection as he encounters Esau and as he re-enters the land of Canaan.**

**Jacob indeed presents to God his call of the helpless, which is the true call of faith. And God blesses him, not due to faith, as if faith can order God around if one is loud enough or sustained enough – No, rather, God blesses Jacob in the context of faith.**

## **II.**

**In the Holy Gospel, you see this call of the helpless, this time from the Canaanite Woman.**

**Dr. Luther says this about the encounter that she has with Jesus, and that we have with her. *“This Gospel presents to us a true example of firm and perfect faith. For this woman endures and overcomes in three great and hard battles, and teaches us in a beautiful manner the true way and virtue of faith, namely, that it is a hearty trust in the grace and goodness of God as experienced and revealed through his Word.”***

**So, how does this woman wrestle with God through “three great and hard battles”? She persists in praying the prayer of the helpless. She does not twist our Lord’s wrist. She clings to Jesus in persistent – yes, even stubborn – prayer. It is the prayer of the helpless, because she has no other option.**

**Now, think about that – she has no other option. Oh, she could go after other medical resources, or, she can go back to her child with some home-made**

medicine, or she could just rise up in anger at Jesus and curse him. But none of these things will heal her child. So, by persistent prayer, she clings tenaciously to Jesus' ear, like Jacob of old, until Jesus says to her, "Woman, great is your faith!"

It is as Luther calls it, the *"virtue of faith, namely, that it is a hearty trust in the grace and goodness of God as experienced and revealed through his Word."* This woman comes because of what she has heard about Jesus. That's why she chases after Him when she hears, O miracle of miracles, that Jesus has left his own home territory of Galilee and is now approaching her home town. The woman with no resources, condemned to watch the slow death of her child, now hears that Jesus is nearby, and off she goes to grab Him by the ear with her prayer of the helpless.

It is easy to see how this encounter between this woman and your Savior would be a blessed event.

But she couldn't see that way until after Jesus acts! She is persistent, but this persistent faith is not a matter of throwing temper tantrums until God gives you something you think you want. Her persistence is not about her: it is about helplessness before God and what He does. She prays out of the knowledge of faith, and thus she sees God at work on the basis of His Word and his faithfulness for His elect – His chosen people.

Today, if God's Word has shown to you your need, and if you hear and see by the Word of God that you are now God's elect, His chosen child: then you are prepared, in this Lenten season, to cling to the blessed experience of grabbing God by His ear – participating day-by-day in the call of the helpless! For thus you receive the blessings from your heavenly Father, who meets your every need, according to His love and purpose.