

Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church  
Shobnier, Illinois  
Pentecost 11A - Proper 15A  
August 16, 2020  
Matthew 15:21-28

### The Dog's Crumbs

[Jesus said,] "It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." 27 She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." (Matthew 15:26-27 ESV)

In the name of Jesus, the only Savior of the world,

What do you do when it seems that God is your enemy? What happens when trouble and tribulation come your way? What happens when you suffer affliction - of body, mind, or spirit? What happens when it seems that God is against you rather than for you? You know what I'm talking about. Suffering beyond measure with no relief in sight. Never-ending pain. Watching your loved one's health decline, or yours. A mountain of bills you can't pay. A virus that continues to threaten you. Fear unending. Troubles too numerous to mention. You pray; you pray; and you pray some more, and it seems like God isn't listening. It seems as though God is ignoring you. He doesn't take away your pain. The trouble doesn't go away. It seems that He doesn't really care about you at all. As with Job, it may even seem like God really is your enemy. What do you do then?

You learn from Jacob who wrestled with God and wouldn't let go unless God blessed him. You learn from the Canaanite woman in today's Gospel. Her daughter was severely oppressed by a demon and was suffering terribly. And because she loved her daughter, she wants to relieve her child of the affliction and suffering and bring comfort and health, and she'll do whatever she can to make that happen.

So this poor woman cries to Jesus believing that He will help her. Why would she do that? After all, she was a Gentile. She was a descendant of those the Israelites were to have destroyed when they entered the Promised Land. She had no right or standing to ask Jesus for anything. She certainly didn't deserve to be heard. And yet she must have believed the promise given to Abraham, "In Your Seed, all the nations of the earth shall be blessed" (Gen. 22:18), and that Jesus was that promised Messiah and Savior. Furthermore, she'd probably heard that Jesus had helped many others, including those who had been likewise oppressed by a demon.

So, with nothing to lose and everything to gain, and believing that the Savior promised to Abraham would be for all people, she cried out, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon." She confesses that Jesus was the One promised so long ago, and she begs for mercy. She does not want what she deserves, she wants mercy. She

wants from Jesus what she has no right to demand. She believes that only Jesus can help her and that He will.

But Jesus isn't nice. He doesn't answer her a word. He ignored her. But that didn't deter her. She wasn't offended. She didn't go off in a huff as we would undoubtedly do. She continued to cry out to Him. She would not give up.

When the disciples asked Jesus to send her away, it seems they might be asking Him to help her. After all, if that's what it would take to get rid of this annoying woman, then do it. Yet, surprisingly, Jesus doesn't address their compassion or lack thereof. Instead, He seems to agree with them, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." It seems as though Jesus is saying He had come only for the salvation of the Jews. It seems like Jesus is her enemy.

Still, the woman falls down at Jesus' feet in an act of submission and worship. "Lord, help me." Finally, Jesus talks to her, "It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." It doesn't seem that Jesus will help, and, in fact, He insults her. Certainly not the kind of response we'd expect from Jesus.

So, what does this woman do then? She agrees with Him. She has caught Jesus in His words (Luther). "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." She readily confesses that she's not a child of Israel, a Jew, but a gentile dog. She doesn't have a place at the table or even ask for one. Rather, her place is under the table, and she's satisfied with that. She's not entitled to Jesus' help. There is no merit or worthiness in her. And still she trusts in Jesus and says she would gladly receive whatever crumbs, whatever scraps, He would give her.

And for that Jesus praises her, "O woman, great is your faith!" And what made her faith great? She never gave up on Jesus. She never gave up on His mercy, and she would gladly receive from Jesus whatever He would give. And what He gives is mercy beyond measure. He heals her daughter with a word. Yes, throughout this whole episode, this woman believed that Jesus was the long-awaited Savior and that He would help her. Despite all appearances that Jesus was her enemy, didn't love her, didn't care about her, and wouldn't help her, she continued to believe that He would show mercy. Jesus did not fail her.

So when you suffer pain or trouble or heartache, whatever it is, and you are tempted to think that God doesn't love you, doesn't care about you, and isn't going to help you, keep your eyes on Jesus and keep praying for His mercy. Be persistent. Be patient. For He most certainly will give you His mercy. For, though you don't deserve anything good from Him, He has made you God's child and given you a place at His table by virtue of your Baptism into Christ. You've heard His Word and His promises and know that He is faithful and can be trusted to keep His Word and promises. After all, He suffered all for you, even death on the cross, so that you would be His. He gave His life so that you might live with Him and eat at His banquet table forever.

Keep coming to the Lord's Altar to be fed as children, not with crumbs, but with Christ's own Body and Blood, the very ransom price He once offered for your body and soul. Instead of crumbs, He gives you the very Bread of Life which will sustain you now and forever. And when you receive that Body and Blood, hear Him say, "for you." And thus be certain that He is indeed "for you," that He is on your side, that He wants you to share in His life forever. That's what He went to the cross for, after all. That's why He left the door of the grave shattered behind Him. That's why He baptized you into Himself and promised you an eternity of communion with Him.

Yes, my beloved, you can be sure, indeed, you must be sure that, no matter what, Jesus is "for you." And strengthened by His promise, you can wrestle with Him like Jacob and like this Canaanite woman. You too can struggle with Him and say, "However You treat me, whatever You allow to happen to me, I know You will work it for my good because your love for me is unshakable and on that I rest secure and at peace. And, I will not let you go until you bless me." And so He does. And so He will. For He is good. God grant you such faith to the glory of His holy name. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Rev. Timothy J. Landskroener