

September 11, 2011
Pentecost 13

"Crumbs Are More Than Enough When You Have Jesus"

MATTHEW 15:21-28

Leaving that place, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. ²² A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is suffering terribly from demon-possession." ²³ Jesus did not answer a word. So his disciples came to him and urged him, "Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us." ²⁴ He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel." ²⁵ The woman came and knelt before him. "Lord, help me!" she said. ²⁶ He replied, "It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs." ²⁷ "Yes, Lord," she said, "but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." ²⁸ Then Jesus answered, "Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted." And her daughter was healed from that very hour.

Tomorrow I will be going to Thousand Oaks our monthly meeting of pastors in our circuit. I will knock on the door of the pastor's home and be greeted through the screen door by his barking Cocker Spaniel dog named Cody. Cody will follow me into the kitchen and watch me intently as I stand around with the other pastors in the kitchen area and eat my bagel. Cody is watching everyone eat with the hope that some crumbs will fall on the tile floor which he will quickly devour. Maybe you have a dog that is always looking for some crumbs to fall from the table as you are eating.

Before us this morning we have the example of a Canaanite woman who comes to Jesus for help because her daughter is suffering terribly from demon possession. She believes that Jesus is so powerful that if he gives her only a few crumbs of help it will be more than enough to heal her daughter from demon possession. Think of how many times you have gone to Jesus for help, sometimes even pleading with him, "Lord, have mercy on me. Lord, have mercy on me." And what did Jesus give you, a few little crumbs? No, he overwhelmed you with the mercy he showed you.

Instead of a few dried crumbs, think of a loaf of bread baking in the oven. This is no ordinary bread. It is made of the finest Durham whole wheat from the high plains of Colorado, stone ground to perfection. There is nothing like the smell of fresh baked bread. You wait a few minutes for it to cool. Then you slice it carefully with a bread knife, a nice thick piece. You spread butter on it and watch it melt. Then you drizzle a little honey on, sweet clover honey. You savor each bite with your favorite cup of coffee, cup of tea or milk.

I am not here this morning to make you hungry. But we are here to lead each other to be hungry for Jesus and the blessings we have in him. There is nothing that satisfies you more than the love Jesus has for you, and the forgiveness he offers, and the peace with God, and help with all of our problems and troubles. And Jesus wants to give you so much more than just a few little crumbs, as we shall see in this lesson on the Canaanite woman.

Faith turns to Jesus and his mercy for help

There is no better place to turn in time of need than Jesus. That is where we see the Canaanite woman turning for help when she struggled each day with her daughter who was demon possessed. "Leaving that place, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out, 'Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is suffering terribly from demon possession.'" Jesus left the land of Galilee which was a region of darkness for an even greater region of darkness, the area along the Mediterranean seacoast, where local Canaanites or Palestinians far outnumbered the Jewish people.

Here in this land of darkness, the light of the gospel was shining in the life of this mother who desperately needs help. She comes to Jesus and addresses him as her Lord. She calls him the Son of David. She believed what you believe this morning about Jesus your Savior. He is your Lord and God from all eternity, yet also the Son of Man who came to earth to save you. She pleads to Jesus for mercy, because she believes with all her heart that he has the power as God and the mercy of God to help her in her need. It never ceases to amaze us even today how the message of salvation can reach into the lives of people where we may least expect to find it. It may be that the gospel is reaching more people in China and India and even in Muslim countries than we can imagine. Romans 10 says the sound goes out into all the world.

This woman cries to Jesus for help. The Greek word used for cry is "krazo." It is one of those words that sounds like what it means. Think of your dog howling in pain, or your cat crying, or the scream of a child in pain. This mother is crying out to Jesus in pain because she cannot bear another day of seeing her daughter possessed by an evil spirit. Have you ever found yourself crying out "Lord, have mercy" during a time your child was sick or suffering? Someone you love is dying and you find yourself saying, "Lord, have mercy" Ten years ago, at this time, you watched in horror as terrorists struck our country and you found yourself praying, "Lord have mercy on these people, the fire fighters, the policemen, the people of our country. There are times when our prayers are very short and very intense. During such times all we can say is "Lord, have mercy!" You open your life to sin and find yourself so ashamed of who you are and so afraid of God's wrath and punishment that you deserve. You cry out with David "Have mercy on me a sinner."

Faith trusts Jesus and his mercy for help

This woman who turned to Jesus for help is now strengthened in her trust that Jesus will help. Jesus strengthens her faith by putting it to the test. Our loving Lord and Savior who gave his life for us at the cross appears to be cruel and mean to this woman, but he is not. It says here that "Jesus did not answer a word." Jesus did not answer this woman. He appears to ignore her. You know what that is like don't you? There seems to be times when Jesus is not giving us an answer to our prayers and almost ignoring us. Listen to how Job prayed during his lowest moments in life: "Though I cry, 'I have been wronged' I get no response; though I call for help there is no justice." When we call 911 we expect to get a response. We do not expect someone to ignore our phone calls. But our God is never far away from us even though it may appear to us that he is ignoring us. Psalm 145 says, "The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth."

How does this woman of great faith handle this test of her faith? She keeps going after Jesus and continually cries out to him even louder, "Lord, have mercy on me! Lord, have mercy on me!" The disciples are so troubled by her loud cries for mercy they tell Jesus, "Send her away, for she keeps crying after us." They do not ask Jesus to send her away. They tell Jesus to send her away. The disciples were annoyed by the sound of this woman's voice crying out in pain. Jesus loved every effort she made to seek his help. In the Revelation we hear the persecuted Christians crying out to Jesus with a loud voice, "How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?"

Jesus was not finished with this woman. He tells his disciples, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." Loving Lord and Savior, how could you be so cruel to say this to your disciples and say it so loudly that this poor woman can hear what you just said? It sounds as if Jesus cares only about the Jewish people and could care less about this Canaanite woman. That would conflict with what Jesus told Nicodemus when he said, "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life."

Dear Christians do you not see how our Lord and Savior is setting a trap for this woman, a wonderful trap of love that will strengthen her faith even more? The woman hears Jesus describe going after the lost sheep. Faith takes a hold of the word "lost" and says: "Jesus cares about people who are lost. I am lost in my sin. I know that he must also care about me. So she enters into the trap of love and prays even more fervently, "Lord help me!"

Jesus loves me this I know for the Bible tells me so." The Bible has a wonderful way of convincing me that Jesus loves me. As I look at my sin that separates me from God, I wonder how Jesus could ever love or hear my cry for mercy. But then in his Word, the Holy Bible, we hear how Jesus say, "The Son of God has come to save that which was lost." Faith joins the woman and takes a hold of the word "lost." If I am lost, then there is hope for me, because Jesus said he had come to seek and save the lost. There is hope for me because in Romans 5 we are told, "You see at just the right time when we were still powerless Christ died for the ungodly." I may not be so wicked as to kill 3000 people by flying airplanes into buildings, but I have not always loved people as I should, nor have you." Words like lost, world, and ungodly assure me there is room in God's mercy for me.

Is Jesus finally finished with strengthen this woman's faith or will he make endure even more? Listen to what comes next. She cries out in agony, "Lord, help me!" and Jesus says to her, "It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs." How could Jesus be so cruel as to imply the Jewish people were God's children and she was just a dog? But her strong faith given to her by God himself sees in that word "dog" evidence of God's grace and mercy. The word used her for "dog" does not mean the kind of dirty dog that runs wild in the streets at night and feeds on the garbage. I thought of the times I heard my Dad yell at some cow that was giving him trouble with the words, "You dirty dog!" Jesus is using a word for dog that means "pet dog." Here is the dog that likes to sit on your lap, and even look up at you for some reward from your hand. The woman knows what people do with their dogs. If they don't have much food, they will feed the children first and maybe there will a few crumbs that fall to the ground that the poor hungry little pet dog can find for itself. So she says to Jesus, "Yes, Lord, even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table."

Do your eyes of faith see what this woman saw in Jesus? Even if he were to only give her a few crumbs of mercy that would be more than enough to heal her daughter, because those crumbs were from the hand of God himself and had such power. She knows and believes with all her heart, just as you do, that with the Lord there is not just a few crumbs of mercy, not just a few loaves of mercy, but a truckload of mercy that is beyond comprehension. Jesus sees the great faith and says, "Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted." What do you eyes see as you look up at a cross? You see a man suffering for six hours. You see blood pouring from his body. You see a head covered with a crown of thorns, but you also see Jesus God's Son and you know the suffering that took place was done by God himself to atone for every sin you ever committed. Our ordinary eyes see a crumb. Faith sees a cross and so much more. You have so much more than just a few crumbs of mercy when you have Jesus. That is why we pray so fervently, "Lord have mercy on us!" Amen.