

September 6

When Crumbs are Enough

Mark 7:24-37

This is one of the more disturbing stories that comes from the life of Jesus. In reading commentaries, most scholars want to downplay or excuse Jesus' remarks to the woman. Whether we like it or not, this encounter between Jesus and this unnamed Gentile woman does not put Jesus in the best of light. His cultural, religious and national biases come out. Let us look at what happened before we explore what it says to us. Mark wants us to know that Jesus had gone to this area to escape the crowds. He wanted some time to recharge his mental and physical batteries. Yet even here he was known for his healing ministry. Mark says, "He didn't want anyone to know that he had entered a house," but he couldn't hide. Soon after arriving, this woman, filled with concern for her child, comes and falls at his feet, begging Jesus to heal her daughter. In giving us the details of this encounter Mark lets us know that it was tension filled. Jesus was tired and wanted to get away from the crowds. His peace was interrupted by a Gentile woman begging for help. Jesus knew that if he helped her his vacation would be over. Jesus did not respond well. He says, "The children have to be fed first. It isn't right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs." Wow. Here you have a time when you see Jesus as a typical Jewish male showing contempt for Gentiles and women. There is no way to sugar coat it. He called this woman and her child dogs.

Was Jesus just having a bad day? Was he a little more Jewish and male centric that we think? We don't know. This entire conversation would have likely been forgotten except for what happened next. The response of the woman made it memorable for Jesus and his disciples. Now I don't know about you but if I were the woman and had gotten such a rebuke from Jesus I would have probably bowed my head in sorrow and slunk out the door. She, on the other hand, comes right back at Jesus saying even dogs get to eat the children's crumbs.

Jesus replies, "Good answer. Go home your daughter has been healed." She engaged Jesus in a way that not even his disciple would do. Her response was one not

to be resisted. What she said was, "Call me a dog. Fine I am a dog. I will take a dog's portion of your time and healing." All houses have dogs and they hang around the children when they are eating. Any crumbs of food that fall on the floor are theirs to eat. She was saying she was happy to have a crumb of time and compassion from Jesus. The healing of her daughter comes, not because of her faith as often is the case in healing stories regarding Jesus, but because of her sharp and incisive answer. It surprised Jesus and he respected her.

Today I want us to think about what a crumb of healing and compassion might look like. Too often we want so much more. We expect, demand, total healing or justice or whatever. We never think about a crumb, would be insulted to even have someone suggest that it is enough. But I have seen often where just a crumb of what we wanted or needed was enough.

There was the man who was diagnosed with cancer. He and his family prayed for healing. When it became obvious that this was not going to be God's plan some became angry at God, at life. His granddaughter was going to graduate from high school in a few months. They had been very close during her growing years. He didn't pray for healing, but to live long enough to celebrate with her that special day. As graduation time came he was too weak to go to her graduation ceremony. As soon as it was over she drove to his house to show him her diploma and have a picture with him. He was able to give her a special gift he had been saving for her. He died a few days later. For her, that moment with him in celebration was enough. It was just a crumb of their wishes and desires but it was enough.

I recall hearing a story about a woman who went to her pastor expressing her wish that the church start a new adult Bible study. The pastor listened, heard her commitment to it, and said, "I will do what I can to help, but you should lead it." She was taken aback. She wanted someone else to lead but finally agreed. They both prayed about it for several weeks before announcing it to the church. When the day of the first meeting came she was at the church early, she laid out Bibles and materials. She waited patiently and when the time came for the group to begin there was just one other person there. Instead of being disappointed she decided that this person really needed

to be there, just like her, and this is what God wanted to happen. It was only a crumb of her expectations but because she embraced it, the two women began the study. They continued to invite others. Slowly the numbers grew, one here, one there. She is gone, as is her friend, but many decades later the class is still going, named for her, and her story of perseverance is recalled on the anniversary of that group's founding. That class has been a blessing and support for many. What would have happened if she had disbanded the class after that first meeting because just one showed up?

So I want you to think about your needs and desired. Think about the things you have in the past or are now taking to God in prayer. Sometimes, like the woman in the story, you are desperate because someone you love is in real crisis. You pray to God and the response you get might feel like God doesn't understand the depth of your problem. It feels like rejection. All that seems to happen is that you get just a little something to help. It is only a crumb of what you want, what you feel you need.

How do you respond? Do you go away with those feeling of rejection? Or do you proclaim yourself ready to accept the crumbs, whatever they are and say, "With you God I know it will be enough!" We know from this sermon that this second response is the one we are supposed to give but it is so hard to be willing to accept crumbs. When what we get seems so little in light of our needs it is difficult to say, "It is enough."

To do this we need to acknowledge that God listens and is willing to help. The woman, in spite of her rejection, believed Jesus could help. Her saying, "Give me the crumbs" was an acknowledgement that he could help her, at least a little. She had the faith that even if she did not get all that she wanted, a little from Jesus was better than nothing at all. That trust in him was what surprised Jesus. He was surrounded by disciples who spent years listening to his words and seeing him compassionately treat people. What does he find in them? He hears squabbles about who was first, who was to sit at his right hand, complaints that people were using his name for healing and were not part of the group. They found it very hard to be happy with crumbs. This woman got it. Crumbs from God, even though we might want more, can be enough, even more than enough.

So God hears, God will respond, when you seek help. The way God responds sometimes feels as if all we have gotten is crumbs. We can be upset or we can rejoice when that occurs. We are called to trust knowing that many great things come from small beginnings. From crumbs come healing, forgiveness, new vision and hope.

May all of us say, we are happy with crumbs, for from you, O God, it is enough.