

## May 13 – A Crumb of Faith

Matthew 15:21-28

One of the major tenants of our faith is the belief that Jesus was fully divine and fully human. We celebrate how God in Christ came to live amongst us. What we do not always acknowledge, with as much fervency, was Jesus' humanity. In this story we see his humanness all over the place. He was absolutely a male Jew of that time and place. In this story those sociological opinions of woman are out there for all to see. We want to explain them away. Instead, I want us to let this onetime encounter challenge us as Jesus was challenged.

On Mother's Day, I am ending our look at people who had a onetime encounter with Jesus with this Canaanite woman. She is the epitome of the "Me Too" movement. She pushed back against demeaning words even if they came from Jesus! It changed Jesus' perceptions of her. It is a reminder that we need to be more tolerant and see people as individuals, not in categories. This is especially true concerning the women of our lives whom we honor this day.

Hear this from a commentary: "It should not be lost that the example of such victorious faith is a Gentile woman, doubly an outsider. But the text should not thereby be embellished and placed in the service of an ideology, as though the Canaanite is an aggressive single parent who here defies cultural taboos and acts to free Jesus from his sexism and racism by catching him in a bad mood or with his compassion down, besting him in an argument and herself becoming the vehicle of his liberation and the deliverance of her daughter. Rather, the story serves to challenge the sexism and racism of readers, ancient and modern, who tend not only to consider those of different gender and ethnicity as "the other," somehow more distant from God and the divine order and plan than our own group. The story invites readers to place themselves in the role of the other, to struggle not only with God, but also with our own perceptions of the other, and pronounces such enduring struggle to be great faith."

We would wish sexism, racism and intolerance were not in the Bible, but they are there because they are a part of life. This story reminds us to never treat people as

unworthy of love and respect. It is especially important today to work against all those forces that would keep women down. Whenever we hear of men belittling the accomplishments of women, treating them as objects to be exploited sexually, we need to stand up and say this is wrong. We need to remember the Canaanite woman who knew she was a person of worth, even if for a brief instant Jesus forgot that and make sure no woman feels this way. This encounter changed Jesus because from here on in his ministry, he seems to have a more expansive and tolerant approach to Gentiles and women. His human side learned a great lesson that day.

What I want to focus on for the remainder of our sermon is the words she said, "Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall off their master's table." We tend to jump right over this statement because we do not like the dog analogy. But I think of what those words have to teach us, which is that crumbs of mercy, from God are enough!

Too often when it comes to life and to faith we want it all. We won't be happy unless God answers our needs in just the way we wish. We expect God's blessing to fill us to overflowing. Now we know this is the case, but we want to define the river of blessing that is to bathe our needs and we won't be satisfied with anything less than all of our needs being met when we expect it and in the way we expect.

If we are not careful we can be like the child who came home from a birthday party. They were disappointed that they didn't get any birthday cake. The mother was surprised that they didn't have cake so she questioned her son a little more. Was there a cake? Yes. Did they share the cake? Yes. But the cake was white and for him birthday cakes are chocolate. For him to have birthday cake he needed a slice of chocolate cake. Anything else wasn't acceptable. So he had cake, not birthday cake in his perception, and was disappointed. I wonder if God, at times, feels that we are like that little boy. We receive blessings but since they weren't what we wanted or expected we are not happy. We know God will give us more than a crumb of mercy. But even if all we get is a crumb we need to be happy with what we get.

The second take away I get from this story is that we need to celebrate what we have instead of comparing. Jesus was talking about bread given to children and she

was talking about crumbs. On a comparison basis she was falling way short. But she had an awareness of God's mercy that went beyond anything the disciples had displayed. She realized just a little of God's mercy would be enough. She wasn't concerned about what others received. She was not going to be disappointed if others got more. A little was just fine by her. Do you begin to see why Jesus was surprised and ultimately commended her for her great faith? Just a few verses before he had chastised Peter for his little faith. Now he was seeing a great faith from an unlikely place.

How often we get into the compare and evaluate mode when it comes to life, when it comes to our faith. What we get seems great until we learn someone else got more! We pray for healing and are celebrating that the doctors seem to finally have a treatment plan that is working. Then we hear another who talks about being healed, seemingly overnight, and now we are upset. Or we pray for a family member who is struggling and celebrate the progress they make until someone tells us about how well their grandchild is doing and then we are depressed. Compare and evaluate can and does get us into trouble. We need to ask God for help and even if what we get seems like a crumb in comparison to someone else's whole loaf of bread, be happy!,

This leads to the big question, "Can we be satisfied with a little?" Do we believe a "crumb" of God's mercy is enough? That is a harder question to answer in the positive than we might like to admit. Sometimes a crumb leaves us in limbo. We ask for answers and all we get is one thing resolved leading to a lot more questions. Is it enough? We ask for the pain of anger to be taken away and instead we find we are able to get through this day not feeling as consumed by the negative feelings as yesterday. And so the list goes on. Sometimes what we get from God does not seem like much. Do we still give thanks for that crumb of love, of forgiveness, of wisdom and of grace?

Sometimes, in accepting the crumb with gratitude we find we have unleashed blessings unimaginable. The woman asked for just a crumb of mercy and what happened? She got complimented for her faith and her daughter found healing. I recall a story where the person had lost their job. She prayed for work. She put out all sorts of applications in her field. No one was hiring in marketing. She was feeling anxious and

depressed. She prayed and it seemed as if God was turning a deaf ear. Then a friend, who knew of her struggles, told her about a temporary job at their company. It was as a fill-in receptionist. She hated doing that kind of work but she had been praying saying she would be grateful for whatever came along. She took the job and gave thanks to God for the work. The day she went to work she dressed her best, put on a big smile, and was determined to be a blessing to everyone. She was not going to think about why she was doing this instead of what she wanted. She was going to give it her all. The job was to last a month. All during that month she prayed each day to bring a positive attitude to work. She never said anything negative about it and instead told all that it was an answer to prayer. At the end of the month the vice-president asked to speak to her. He was impressed with her positive helpful attitude. He said, "People like you are hard to find. Will you stay on in the company?" She bounced from temp job to temp job for a bit but when one opened up in her field she was given it and it was the best job ever. A crumb turned into incredible blessing. She would write, "Even if things had not worked out at the company, I learned that in bringing a positive attitude to work any job can be rewarding."

We worship a God of grace and blessing. We too often demand more than we should and sometimes get disappointed with what we receive. May we learn from this woman to be positive about ourselves, know God cares and be happy with what we get.