

### Crumbs of Grace

Texts: Romans 11:1-2a, 29-31, Matthew 15:21-28

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During vacation, I have to admit that there were a few times when we allowed the dog to sit by the table while we were eating a meal where he sat in the hopes of getting scraps or crumbs which would fall from the table. It is not something we do at home. Auggie knows that while we are at the kitchen table eating a meal, he is to be in the dining room – looking longingly at our food and hoping for something to drop so that he can come in after the meal and perform his cleanup duties.

Our Scripture text for this morning is about a dog's crumbs and how it relates to God's grace through His Son, Jesus Christ. In the passage, Jesus has gone to the region of Tyre and Sidon. Tyre and Sidon were Gentile regions, away from the land of the Israelites, so it is a wonder why Jesus would have traveled to this area. Maybe He just needed to get away from the crowds to collect Himself and recharge. However, word must have gotten to this area about the things that Jesus was doing because Jesus is approached by this Canaanite woman. She had a mission and a purpose. Her daughter is possessed by a demon, and it is wreaking havoc on her life – and most probably on the lives of everyone around her. This woman cries out to Jesus for some help, even addressing him as the Son of David. So, indeed, she was familiar with Him and hearing about the miracles He had performed.

What the disciples saw was someone who was unclean (she was a Canaanite, after all) – unruly – and way too persistent for their liking. Notice that the text says that Jesus does not say a word through all of this. But the disciples come to Jesus and urge Him – “Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us.” She is a bother to their mission – or to the rest they are trying to get in this land. Then come Jesus' response: “I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.” I

imagine that this reply from Jesus might have stung. It may have rattled the woman to her core. All she wants – all she desperately wants – is for her daughter to be healed and rid of this burden.

We know in our heads that what Jesus spoke to the woman was the truth – He was sent only to the people of Israel as their Messiah. However, in my heart this week, this seems like a harsh response from Jesus – maybe even an un-Jesus response. If the woman was hurt by it, she certainly did not show it because she follows up with another plea, “Help me!” Here is another chance for Jesus to respond the way that she wants Him to. And then... “It is not right for me to take the children’s bread and toss it to the dogs.” Yikes! That seems even harsher of a response to me. Where is the “love God, love your neighbor” side of Jesus here? Could He not work something out for her? Clearly she is hurting – her daughter is suffering. As a parent, I would do the exact same thing as this woman. What next for the woman? Will this deter her faith?

Sometimes we need this kind of response from God, for the answer from Him is no. Especially in these times, though, we do not like to hear that. We want what we want when we want it. When we pray for something as desperately as the Canaanite woman is pleading, our prayer is with the expectation that our answer from God will be what we want. When it does not happen that way, how often are we frustrated, angry, and maybe even unruly before God? And at times, the answer we get – or lack thereof of an answer – seems harsh for our all-loving, all-powerful God.

In those moments, we are left with a choice. We can persist in the faith, even if the answer is not what we want to hear. And that is tough depending on the prayer request. Or we can let the answer from God diminish our faith and pull us away from our relationship with God through Jesus Christ. And that choice is ours to make. How do we choose?

The Canaanite woman made her choice. She persisted. Carla Works, Associate Professor in New Testament at Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, DC, gives us this perspective. She writes, “The woman, however, is not deterred. She claims a place in the household, but it is not a position of privilege or even the position of an insider. She accepts the status of a family’s dog by claiming that even the dog enjoys crumbs from the table.

Her statement is striking. She places hope in what others have discarded. This Son of David has so much power that there is enough power for the house of Israel and more than enough left over for her. She is not trying to thwart his mission. She just wants a crumb, recognizing that even a crumb is powerful enough to defeat the demon that has possessed her daughter. Jesus praises her faith. This woman seems to understand what the members of the household of Israel have yet to grasp - Jesus is not just hope for Israel, but hope for the world.

In the passage that immediately precedes this story, Jesus responds to challenges from the scribes and Pharisees by reframing the boundaries of clean and unclean. In 15:18, Jesus declares that what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and what comes out of the heart determines what makes one clean. What comes out of the Canaanite woman’s heart is faith -- certainty that Jesus has power enough for Israel and power enough to save her non-Israelite daughter.

Her words demonstrate that the boundary separating her from the house of Israel must be reconsidered. With a faith so pure, how can she be deemed unclean? The encounter with the Canaanite woman prepares the reader for Jesus’ great commission to go and to make disciples of all the nations (28:20)” (From Internet. [www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=2145](http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=2145). 08/11/20).

Her desire is not for an abundance of God's grace like those invited to the table, but just a crumb – a crumb of grace. That was enough for her, and she trusted Jesus that it would be enough for her daughter. And it was. The crumbs of grace were in Jesus' words – "Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted." She was not one of the sheep of Israel – she was unclean. Yet, Jesus reached her with enough.

What is enough for us? Do we need a seat at the table in our faith or are the crumbs of grace sufficient? Where is our faith in terms of persistence during these days? These are great questions for us to reflect on, to consider for our lives in light of this passage. Jesus is the hope for all the world. Jesus has power and grace enough for all. And the irony in all of it is that the crumbs meant for the dogs have become for us, in light of His death and resurrection, invitations for each of us to join Him at the abundance of the table. To join Him in God's unconditional love and grace.

"For God's gifts and his call are irrevocable...that they too may now receive mercy as a result of God's mercy to you" is what Paul wrote to the Roman church in the first Scripture reading, which Steve read. It is an invitation to be a recipient of God's call and God's mercy. That invitation is there for us even when the answer to our prayer is no. Even when we are experiencing times of great suffering. The crumbs become our feast as the hope of Jesus assure us and strengthen us. Crumbs of grace – they are ours. Let us partake. Let us pray...

God of grace, we thank You for both the crumbs and the abundance that You give to us. We thank You and praise You for the gift of this woman's faith, and we pray for faith like hers – to be persistent and strong in all things. Thank You for Your grace and unconditional love which sustains us and supports us in all seasons of our lives. In Christ's name, Amen.