

SERMON: Crumbs of Grace
TEXT: Matthew 15:21-28

8-16-2020

Greetings. I am *that woman*. That *dog*, as Jesus implied. I wasn't named in this story, because I'm a woman. And worse than that - at least in the minds of the Jewish people, including Jesus - I am a Canaanite. Not Jewish. A Gentile. So, yes, a dog. Not a cute, cuddly, beloved pet dog. But a scavenger. Unclean. Unwanted. Sub-human.

Jesus had ventured in *my* neighborhood that day. To him, it would have been a bad neighborhood. So, he tried to ignore me when I approached him. He pretended he didn't hear me, hoping I'd slink away with my tail between my legs. I started shouting. "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David." I used this title to appeal to his place of high standing among the Jews. I wanted him to know that I knew who he was. And I knew what he could do. Still, he didn't answer. The other men with him urged him to shoo me away.

Finally, he spoke. It was not so much an answer to my pleading, but more of a proclamation - or a reminder - of his mission. Specifically, the limits of his

mission. “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” As if I didn’t know my place in that society!

I know that I’m not one of God’s chosen people. Believe me, I’m reminded of it every day. As a Canaanite and a Gentile, I’m invisible, at best. I’m not privileged. I have no wealth. No name recognition. I’m basically the lowest member of the food chain, down there with the dogs looking for scraps and crumbs among the garbage. Most people would rather I didn’t exist. They’d be better off without me, and they think I’d be better off dead. I don’t count. I don’t matter.

But I wasn’t begging for myself. I wasn’t shouting out of arrogance or anger. I was shouting because I was desperate. I was pleading for my daughter. I knew that Jesus was a man of mercy, and he had the power to release her from the demon that tormented her. I just needed to convince him that **her** life matters! She’s just a child. I was on my knees. “Lord, help me!”

He seemed so cold and detached at that moment. Nothing like the gentle teacher and healer I’d heard about. He seemed unmoved by my cry of desperation.

He looked down at me as he answered, “It is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs.”

Again, he was trying to maintain his focus on the children of Israel, the chosen people. It was like he had blinders on and could not be distracted by the others. Other people. Other needs. But it’s not as if mercy and grace are in limited supply. Healing my daughter won’t mean that someone else is deprived of healing.

Though I’m not an Israelite and not of the Jewish faith, I believed what I’d heard about Jesus. I believed that he had shown unprecedented acceptance and love for outcasts. He shared meals and offered healing and forgiveness to lepers, tax collectors, and even prostitutes! If they could be shown grace and mercy, then why couldn’t I?

I wasn’t asking Jesus to “take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs,” as he suggested. “Yes, Lord,” I said, “yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master’s table.”

Just the CRUMBS OF GRACE. I wasn't asking for much. I knew without a doubt that Jesus could heal and free my daughter with just a few crumbs of grace.

Okay, maybe I shouldn't have argued with Jesus, challenged him like this. I know I was way out of line in terms of how a woman was expected to behave in public, and in dealing with a man. But, put yourself in my place for just a moment. If you're a parent - especially if you're a mother - you understand how you become a Mama Bear when your child's life is threatened or in danger. My daughter needed healing. And I would keep hounding Jesus until I got it. I was not going to take *no* for an answer.

I prefer to think of my interaction with Jesus as similar to the story of Jacob when he wrestled with God. They wrestled all night long, and even when God put Jacob's hip out of joint, Jacob still would not give up the struggle. He said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." (Genesis 32:26) So, God did bless him, and changed his name to Israel.

Furthermore, in hindsight, we all know that Jesus' mission of salvation was later expanded to include Gentiles as well as Jews. Maybe in my unrelenting and persistent wrestling with Jesus, I helped to plant that seed.

I suspect you, too, have wrestled or argued with God when you were desperate for an answer to prayer. You, too, may have shouted to the heavens and shaken your fists when you felt ignored by God.

I've thought about this for a long time, and I think the focus of Jesus' mission was a bit misplaced. Instead of making it about **who** should be saved, perhaps the true mission of Jesus was more about **how** *everyone* might be saved: through an abundance of mercy and grace. Mercy: when God doesn't give us what we deserve. Grace: when God gives us what we don't deserve.

I was nobody. I didn't deserve any better treatment than a stray dog. But I would fight for what I knew Jesus was able to give: just a few CRUMBS OF GRACE.

Finally, I know it's upsetting to think that Jesus - the Son of God, whom you worship as a divine being - would treat anyone as harshly as he treated me that day. But even as he was fully divine, he was also fully human. He had human emotions. He wept with grief at the death of his friend. He turned over the merchant tables in the temple in anger. He became impatient with the disciples who slept while he prayed. He cried out in anguish from the cross, "My God, why have you forsaken me?"

So, what makes us think that he couldn't have a bad day? That he might be so focused on reaching the chosen people, that he would momentarily forget that he was sent to love the whole world.

Despite his harsh words to me, I knew that he was a person of love and mercy and grace. I knew that he was the one I needed. I had faith in Jesus, and - yes - I shouted until he heard me.

I thank you for listening to my story today. I pray that you will learn to listen to the voices of others who shout in order to be heard. And I pray that all people will find a seat at the table for a feast of mercy and grace... to the glory of God!