

Matthew 15:21-28 -- ²¹ Jesus left that place and withdrew into the region of Tyre and Sidon. ²² There a Canaanite woman from that territory came and kept crying out, “Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David! A demon is severely tormenting my daughter!” ²³ But he did not answer her a word. His disciples came and pleaded, “Send her away, because she keeps crying out after us.” ²⁴ He answered, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” ²⁵ But she came and knelt in front of him, saying, “Lord, help me.” ²⁶ He answered her, “It is not good to take the children’s bread and throw it to their little dogs.” ²⁷ “Yes, Lord,” she said, “yet their little dogs also eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.” ²⁸ Then Jesus answered her, “Woman, your faith is great! It will be done for you, just as you desire.” And her daughter was healed at that very hour.

In the name of our crucified, arisen, ascended and ruling Savior, Jesus Christ. Dear brothers and sisters.

When Karla and I lived in Waco, Nebraska, I was on the faculty of Nebraska Ev. Lutheran High School. One Sunday afternoon after preaching in Clatonia, we stopped at the Lincoln Humane Society. We had talked about getting a dog. We weren’t really prepared for that. No dog dishes. No leash. No idea how to train a house dog. I knew farm dogs, but not house pets. Well, you can probably guess what happened. There were five Dalmatian pups from a litter of nine. Four were very noisy, but one stood at the back of the pen. He wouldn’t come near us. He looked so sad with those big black spots around his eyes. We named him Patches. Any name more dignified just didn’t seem to fit. We probably abused him, because I don’t think he ever realized he was a dog. He was part of the household and maybe even eventually lord of house. Patches would hang on my every word. He knew “walkies”. He knew “O give thanks . . .”. When we moved to Germany we initially left him on the farm with my parents. My Grandma Jaeger was living there at that time and she give him table scraps after every meal, so he quickly learned that the table prayer meant that he would soon get his food. I trained him to hold his treat on his nose until I said “OK”. He also knew what “Patches” (with a deep voice, spoken slowly) meant – “Don’t do that!”. Through repetition he had learned to hang on a few of my words.

It’s probably because Jesus talks about dogs that makes me think of Patches and the lady from the region of Tyre and Sidon. She somehow had learned to cling to every word of Jesus. She was a Canaanite from a very heathen region, but she called Jesus, “Son of David.” She knew he was the fulfillment of God’s promise to send the Messiah. Jesus’ reputation as a teacher and miracle worker had preceded him to that region, but she knew him as much more and hung on his every word.

From her example we are encouraged this morning to

Cling to the Words of Jesus

- Crying out in faith in God’s mercy and
- - Rejoicing in his “crumbs”

1. Her prayer was a prayer of humility, crying out in faith for God’s mercy.

No complaining, no lament of how unfair life is, she doesn’t challenge Jesus on why this was happening, she doesn’t simply grit her teeth and bear it either. Nor does she try bargaining with Jesus. She humbly goes to Jesus, seeking mercy from One she knew had miraculous strength and endless compassion.

Our pride often stops us short of such humility. So easily we often think we know better, we try to fix it ourselves or maybe we just resign ourselves and simply learn to live with it. How often and easily we can quickly forget to go to our loving God.

How comforting and instructive are the Lord’s words to Moses on Mt. Sinai as he established the Old Testament covenant. In Exodus 34:6 Moses tells us that God described himself as a God of free and faithful grace – “the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness”. So we can pray with the humility of the lady from Tyre and Sidon. Lord, have mercy on us! We do that in our confession of sins – I a poor miserable sinner come to you for mercy and spiritual healing.” We certainly come with that same humility as we pray concerning the troubles and challenges of our daily lives in this deeply troubled world. “Lord have mercy on me! I am powerless and desperately need your help. You alone grant what is good. Only you can answer my prayer, my Plea. For I am a beggar with nothing of my own. I fall before you relying on your mercy alone. Pity me with your kind help, your compassion, with your goodness and mercy.”

Jesus' apparent silence to our prayers can help us – a far greater struggle than the troubles themselves. Has he forgotten me? Does he care? Then we can cling to all the promises of Scripture that assure us that he does care. “Never will I leave you, never will I forsake you.” Hebrews 13:5. The Lord is my helper (Hebrews 13:6) “Call upon my in the day of distress. I will deliver you, and you will honor me.” (Psalm 50) With his silence Jesus leads us deeper into the Scriptures. By faith we cling to his words, wrestle with him in prayer and patiently wait and watch for his answer to our prayer.

2. With that same faith we rejoice along with the woman from Tyre and Sidon as we receive “crumbs” from our gracious God.

Now, when Jesus breaks his silence, his words do not sound too hopeful, do they? He was not heading to this foreign land to carry on his ministry there. According to God's plan, the Gospel would go into all the world after Jesus died and rose. During his earthly ministry, Jesus' work focused on Israel. That's what he makes clear as he says, “I was sent only for the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matthew 15:24).

Yet even those words imply mercy, don't they? He comes for the lost, for those in need, like a shepherd seeking his sheep. And does not the name *Israel* mean to struggle with God? Wasn't that the name the Lord gave Jacob after he wrestled with him in prayer throughout the night?

The woman's faith still clings to the Lord's mercy. She falls before Jesus begging, “Lord, help me!”. Jesus replies, “It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to their little dogs.”

Faith accepts what Jesus says. “Yes, Lord”, she answers. Your words are true. We see her humility again, which we talked about in the first part. “Yes, Lord, I'm like a dog begging at the table. I don't deserve your help. I only beg for your mercy.”

But now notice how she clings to his words with confident hope: “Yet their little dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table.” Faith holds Jesus to his word, and Jesus lets himself be pinned with his promises so that faith wins the victory.

Such faith that clings to Jesus' words confidently rejoices. It rejoices even in the crumbs, for faith knows that our Lord's crumbs are more than enough to satisfy our needs. Even crumbs from Jesus could heal her daughter, driving out the demon. Her faith begs, clinging to Jesus' words alone, confidently rejoicing in his crumbs.

You, dear Christian, also know why our Master's crumbs are more than enough to answer our begging. For the Father has already given us his greatest treasure, his own beloved Son. Compared to Jesus, compared to his blood, compared to his Easter victory, anything else we could ask for is but crumbs! For in Jesus and his cross, all the riches and bounties of heaven are already yours. What a lavish banquet has been prepared for you! So faith confidently rejoices in the crumbs that our Lord blesses this life with, knowing the riches he has already won for us. For faith begs, clinging to Jesus' words alone, his words that have already brought us such riches through the Scriptures and the Sacraments.

So maybe there are a few lessons I can learn from Patches. He wasn't too proud to beg. When we were at the dinner table, he was there looking up with his pleading eyes. Even though we ignored him as we ate, he watched and listened waiting with those eyes that beg without saying a word. He knew we (I) would feel sorry for him. And when we let him lick the last crumbs, he eagerly accepted that, happy and content.

Now I know he did that all by instinct and conditioned behavior. But you, dear Christian, have something much greater to hold on to. You have the word of your God and Savior, written for you in the Bible and made visible for you in Baptism and the Lord's Supper. He is your compassionate and gracious God. Witness that at the cross. Humbly cry out for mercy. And when he answers with silence, keep on wrestling with him praying, “Lord, have mercy on me,” as you cling to his word of promise. And as he leads you pin him with his promise, confidently rejoice in whatever way he answers. For even his crumbs more than meet all our earthly needs. Your faith clings to Jesus' words alone. Amen.

The peace of God that surpasses all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.