

September 5, 2021

“Living on Crumbs”

Our text today is one of those which we read and wonder, “*Did Jesus really say that?*” Don’t feel bad when you ask yourself such a question - Jesus disciples asked that question all the time. “*Did I hear him right? Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you?*”

The unpleasant truth at the heart of this story is the **very real division and ill will between Gentiles and Jews**. In other words - while Jesus tells us we are blessed if we value and make peace - there are a whole lot of times and places where peace and good will are not valued. We know this is true; There are an almost unlimited number of ways to slice and dice the human population into varieties of people who are against each another.

Perhaps the biggest challenge facing us in this text is misdirection. We are drawn to Jesus words like watching a train wreck and we just can’t look away. But while he is the savior in our story – it is the woman who is our role model. She – surprisingly enough – is the star of the show.

The woman who has the deck stacked against her **does everything right** in our reading today. We know the phrase, “*Three strikes and you’re out.*” By the standards of her time, she was there. Jesus is a Jewish Rabbi. To preserve their reputation Rabbis didn’t speak to strangers who were women, (strike one). The woman is a Gentile - which means everyone there who was Jewish who was there believed she was **unimportant to God**. (Strike two) And the sickness she wants help eradicating is demon possession which makes the family ritually unclean. (Strike Three) Your out! Be gone! And that’s what everyone in the house with Jesus would have naturally thought. Jesus didn’t surprise them with the phrase he uses which shocks us.

“*Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs.*” Not exactly how we expect Jesus to speak. The aphorism he is using refers to the Jewish people as the children and everyone else as dogs. It was not unusual in Jewish circles to speak this way of Gentiles.

But Jesus has already healed Gentile's twice in Mark's gospel before this passage. If he really believed that would he have done so? What is he doing?

I suspect someone complained. Jesus lets the logic of *"Our group first"* play out in his encounter with this woman. It is as if he is asking, "Is this how you want me to treat people who don't measure up to our ethnic and religious standards?"

Jesus put the pitch across the plate and the woman with three strikes against her hit it out of the park. She showed an amazing combination of traits including initiative, thoughtfulness, and humility. Most people in our time would respond with less grace. *How dare you call me a dog - how dare you act as if you are not obligated to help me. Just who do you think you are?!* Not so the Syrophenician woman. She accepted Jesus words and then showed how they didn't disqualify her request. She rolled with the verbal punch and showed Jesus - using his own words - why he should help her. She calls him Lord. She puts the relationship in light of *how she wants it to be* not how it currently is. *"Lord, even the dogs under the table get crumbs."* She affirms God's mercy of which there is always enough to go around.

What would it mean for us to take this woman at her word? *What would it mean for us to believe that we can live on God's crumbs?* We are forever disappointed that we can imagine more than life can ever give us. But what if crumbs are enough? What if being God's people is enough? This is not telling other people what is enough for them...but knowing deep down what is enough for us.

This woman is the story of the good Samaritan in real life. The person whose background shouts they are outside of God's grace winds up embodying the grace and love of God in deep and meaningful ways. Who are the people we assume are unredeemable and beyond the grace of God? Might these be the very people through whom God will speak to us?

Can someone who wasn't raised like us - teach us about God? Can even crumbs God sends our way be enough to live on? Let's find out.