

Matthew 15:21-28

11th Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 15)

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INI

Do you ever get tired of phone calls or letters in the mail asking you to help some group of people? Or do you wonder about people in our own community who always seem to be asking for help? My answer to myself or to others with these questions is this: Would you rather be the one who is able to help or the one who has to ask for help? That thought changes my attitude. It is indeed a privilege to be able to help others in the name of Christ.

But when we stand before God, we are the beggars. We are the ones who need help. We have nothing to offer. All we can do is stand or kneel before God and be beggars. That was also the situation of the mother in our text today, and how wonderful to learn from Jesus' response to her that Jesus abundantly feeds us the life-giving, sin-forgiving, soul-healing crumbs we need.

Jesus has just been confronted by the scribes and Pharisees about handwashing. He calls them hypocrites "teaching as doctrines the commandments of men" (13:9). He then heads north, away from them, to the Gentile territory of Tyre and Sidon along the Mediterranean Sea. A Canaanite woman comes out to Jesus, crying, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David" (v. 22).

This is amazing. It's unexpected. She is a Canaanite. The Canaanites were the idolatrous people living in the Promised Land whom God had told his people to destroy. Even Abraham made his servant promise that he would not let Isaac marry a Canaanite (Gen 24:3). Yet this woman comes to Jesus, calling him "Lord" and "Son of David," recognizing his authority and that he is God's Messiah.

Her daughter is "severely oppressed by a demon" (v. 22). She is desperate. She is convinced Jesus can help her. She is continual in her pleas. But Jesus does not answer her a word! She is so persistent that the text says the disciples beg Jesus to send her away. That probably means they wanted Jesus to send her away by granting her request. That's implied by his response: "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (v. 24).

He is telling them why he hasn't healed her. She has no standing as a child of Israel. But the woman continues. She begs Jesus. She kneels in front of him. She cries, "Lord, help me" (v. 25).

Jesus responds with this intriguing statement: "It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs" (v. 26). I am not here to start a ministry in Tyre. I am not here to do miracles. She says, "Yes, Lord." She confesses that Jesus is right. She says *absolutely, checkmate, that's exactly what I want. You are feeding the children. Children always spill crumbs. All I want is a crumb! Feed your children. Be the Son of David. And I will receive a crumb.*

"O woman, great is your faith!" says Jesus (v. 28). *It is done! Here is a crumb. Your daughter is healed, freed from her oppressive demon.* Jesus' coming means crumbs, bread, life for the world!

I am a crumb—the other kind of crumb! I am a sinner. I am a Canaanite. I sin, and then I come asking for help? I have no right. No standing to demand anything of Jesus. I deserve nothing from him. And neither do you.

I am demon-tormented. I am sorely oppressed by Satan. He does not leave me alone. He succeeds in getting me to sin. He turns things upside down in my mind. He makes evil seem good. He makes good seem not worth it or not important or even wrong. The devil tormented the Canaanite girl. And he torments me. And he torments you! He gives you no rest. He leads you into sin. Then he torments you on how to hide that sin, how to cover it up. You are demon-tormented.

I am a beggar. I am in need. I cannot solve my problems. I cannot get myself out of my predicament. I cannot free myself from the grasp of Satan. I cannot stop his torments. I cannot get rid of my sins. I cannot get myself to heaven. And, my friends, you can do none of these things

either. You, too, are in need. You are a beggar!

I beg of a God who should, by every right, answer me with silence. Like the Canaanite woman, I deserve no answer. I beg from a Lord who should, due to my sin, send me away empty. Like the Canaanite woman, I deserve none of Jesus' gifts. And neither do you! In your sin, you have no standing, no right to claim or demand or even ask anything from the Son of David.

But I beg of a God who is merciful. The Canaanite woman cries, "Have mercy on me." She trusts that the Messiah is merciful. And she is right. She begs of the right person. There is no point in begging of one who will not have mercy. She begs for Jesus' mercy. And so do I. I beg the Son of David to have mercy on me. And he does! He went to the cross. He suffered hell—to take away those sins that make me so undeserving. You, too, beg of a merciful God. Your God is a God of grace, a God whose chief quality is love, a God who died also for you!

I beg of a Lord who is able to help. The woman of our text comes and kneels before Jesus, saying "Lord, help me!" She knows Jesus is able to grant her request. Yes, not only is God inclined to help me, but he is also *able* to help me. He is a God of power and might. He is a God who hears my prayers and who answers them. Our God, my friends, is able to help you! He hears your prayers when you cry, "Lord, help me!" Your begging is well-placed. Jesus hears and answers. He is able to help!

I beg of a Messiah who has unending crumbs! Crumbs continually fall to me...and now, we are the children! All I need is a crumb—not that I am not all that bad, but because every crumb is so powerful. Every crumb contains the mercy and grace of God. Every crumb heals. Every crumb satisfies. Every crumb forgives.

These are the crumbs that fall to you. They are abundant, never-ending. They feed lost sheep and lost dogs. They feed me. They feed you!

I beg of a Savior who gives me everything. He gave his life into death on that cross. He paid for my sins. The bread that falls from the table into my mouth, it is his own body. And the same is true for you! He took your punishment. He redeemed your soul. He heals your wounds. The bread that falls from the table into your mouth is his body. His blood flows from the cross to the chalice and to your lips. Your Savior gives you everything!

We beg of a God who has crumbs for the world. He desires to feed the world with the bread of life. He wants to feed every lost and hungry sheep and dog, every demon-oppressed soul. He gives us crumbs to take to our neighbor and to share with the world.

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ, we are beggars, and, like the Canaanite woman, we beg from the Son of David. He is merciful, and he is able to hear and grant our prayers. He is a God of unending crumbs. He gives freely the crumbs of his Word and the crumbs of his Sacraments. Every crumb has the power of God. Every crumb heals us, feeds us, and gives us life everlasting! Amen.