

The Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 15)
St. Matthew 15:21-28

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

As you heard over the last couple of weeks, Jesus had just fed the 5000 men, besides women and children, then went for a stroll on the water. (cf. Matthew 14:21ff) Miraculously, a mere five loaves of bread and two fish became a banquet for a great multitude. On top of that, when the crowd finished eating, there were leftovers; twelve baskets full of fragments.

After the events of today's lesson, Jesus does it again, feeding 4000 men, besides women and children. (cf. Matthew 15:38) This time, seven loaves and a few small fish were the meal. And the crowd had their fill. When they were done, once again there were leftovers; seven large baskets full of fragments.

There is much to consider in the placement of these two texts and the things that happened in between. One of the things to consider is that both crowds being fed were Jewish (or mostly Jewish). While neither text says it plainly, there are clues that indicate this. One of those clues would be what Jesus said to the woman in today's text, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." Of course, given that the second feeding takes place after the events of today's lesson, some scholars say that the second crowd was a mixed, Jew-Gentile crowd. As Dr. Jeffrey Gibbs comments on all of these events, though, "Through the course of the narrative, however, the mission to the Gentiles remains a *muted* and *anticipated* theme" (emphasis mine).

The fact that the events of today's lesson happen right between the two feedings is no accident. I'm not saying that Matthew intentionally put it in there between the two feedings and out of place, but that it happened between the two feedings as God had foreordained it to happen. Jesus really fed 5000 men, besides women and children, walked on the water, healed and taught, dealt with the Canaanite woman, healed many more, then fed 4000 men, besides women and children.

Yes, right in the middle of all of that is the Canaanite woman, a Gentile, pleading for mercy on behalf of her demon-possessed daughter. She called Jesus the Son of David, indicating that she knew who He was, and by that, not merely a great teacher or miracle worker, but the Messiah promised in the Hebrew texts—the Law and the prophets. She had faith that YHWH is God and that He will keep His promise to send the Seed of the Woman to crush the serpent's head. (cf. Genesis 3:15) At that moment, the serpent was having his way with her daughter, and the Seed was passing by near her.

At first, Jesus was silent. He didn't even acknowledge her, after all, He had come for Israel, not Canaan. The disciples even asked Jesus to send her away because she was pestering them. She cried out again, "Lord, help me." Lord...again, she acknowledged his mastery over all things. Jesus is Lord, κύριος, Adonai, YHWH! No one can call Him that apart from the Holy Spirit, and this Canaanite woman did just that, twice! How did Jesus respond? "It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs."

Now, Jesus knew her. He knew her better than she knew herself. When He insulted her, calling her a little dog, a little play on words with the fact that she is a Canaanite—the two words sound the same in Greek—He didn't do it to send her away, but to draw her closer to Him. After all, this Canaanite woman called Him Son of David and Lord. Call it a test, if you like, Jesus sought to draw out what she said next. Perhaps she needed to hear herself say it, maybe those hardened disciples needed to—suffice it to say that what she said next needed to be said.

"Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." Remember, she says this right smack dab in the middle of the feeding of two great multitudes of Jews (or mostly Jews) after which there were scraps left over. You could say that the Canaanite woman, in seeking aid for her

daughter, wanted some of the scraps that were in the baskets or large baskets. Even a taste of the goodness of the Son of David, the Lord, Jesus, YHWH, is enough. I mean, who would not want to touch even just the hem of Jesus' garment as he passed by? (cf. Matthew 14:36) Just a little bit, a scrap, a mere touch of the hem, is more than enough, and your cup would run over. (cf. Psalm 23:5)

The woman expressed her God-given faith for all to hear. More than calling Jesus Son of David and Lord, she called out to the God of all creation who alone could help her. Her faith took what Jesus gave her and ran with it. He called her a little dog, and she acknowledged her place before Him, cowering before Him as a puppy before an all-powerful God. "Yes, I am a little dog, Jesus, but I am *Your* little dog; therefore, feed me from the scraps of your goodness. It is enough."

Martin Luther commented beautifully on this text thus:

What a superb and wonderful object lesson this is, therefore, to teach us what a mighty, powerful, all-availing thing faith is. Faith takes Christ captive in his word, when he's angriest, and makes out of his cruel words a comforting inversion, as we see here. "You say," the woman responds, "that I am a dog. Let it be, I will gladly be a dog; now give me the consideration that you give a dog." Thus she catches Christ with his own words, and he is happy to be caught. "Very well," she says, "if I am a dog, I ask no more than a dog's rights. I am not a child nor am I of Abraham's seed, but you are a rich Lord and set a lavish table. Give your children the bread and a place at the table; I do not wish that. Let me, merely like a dog, pick up the crumbs under the table, allowing me that which the children don't need or even miss, the crumbs, and I will be content therewith."

Crumbs filled with goodness is what she receives, and her daughter is healed from that very hour. In fact, she receives the fullness of God's grace: forgiveness, life, salvation, restoration—the right of the children of God!

Dear fellow little dogs, I call you as much not because you are Canaanite, but that because of your sin, you should cower before your Master, and you have no right to ask for the children's feast. If anything, you get the crumbs that fall from the Master's table. Your problem is that you think more highly of yourself than you ought. If Jesus were to call you a little dog, you would huff and scoff. Your pride would be bruised and beaten. You would be angry at God. "Hey, I've been a part of your church for decades. I've sat through countless boring sermons, eaten the same bread and wine week after week, studied the same texts time after time. I'm no dog!" Pride is a problem all deal with, no matter how humble you think yourselves.

Where do you place yourself, though, when you are like that? You place yourself confrontationally before Jesus, not behind him. The thing about being a "good Christian" is that you follow Jesus. You don't jump in front and start complaining about what Jesus is telling you, confronting Jesus about what He calls you, preventing Jesus from doing what He is come to do for you. Peter tried to stop Jesus from going to the cross, and Jesus rebuked him, "Get behind me, Satan." (cf. Matthew 16:23) But Peter was not able to prevent Him, nor do your complaints and confrontation do so; Jesus went to the cross—His eyes were ever fixed toward His dying for you, so He willingly went to die, in order to give you the scraps of His goodness, that you would find a place at the feast which has no end.

What do little dogs do? They follow their masters—their lords—and beg for scraps. Such are you, dear hearers, who call out like the Canaanite woman, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David! Lord, help me!" And that's what He went to the cross to do. He gives Himself over to death in order that you would receive from His sacrifice for your good. That is His mercy toward you, that you who are guilty are declared not guilty for the sake of Jesus Christ—that you don't receive the death that Jesus died for you because He did—by Him, "It is finished." (John 19:30)

And through the death of Christ, out of His great mercy and grace, Jesus gives out the scraps to you from His table.

It looks like this: a little water is applied to you with the Word of God, and you are forgiven, rescued from death and the devil, and given eternal life. Such great blessings from mere drops of water, scraps when compared to the greatness of the rivers, lakes, and oceans which cover this world. It sounds like this: "I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost." Such great blessings from so few words, scraps when compared to the tomes of self-help and self-aggrandizing words which you can find at the bookstore. It works like this, as will happen in a little bit: you will take a morsel of unleavened bread in your mouth and a sip of wine, and they are to you the body and blood of Jesus given to you for the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. Such great blessings from mere pieces of food, scraps when compared to the banquets you can set before yourselves.

But you shouldn't trade them for anything. Baptism cannot compare to any bath or time of swimming when it comes to volume of water, but I would forsake all bathing and swimming but to be baptized, or so the New Man of faith would declare. Fortunately for all, these are not mutually exclusive. Absolution cannot compare to the words of a motivational speaker when it comes to the excitement and uplift of the words, but I would rather hear of my sins forgiven than how to be a better person, or so the New Man of faith would declare. Fortunately, being forgiven does not forbid going to a motivational event, if you so desired. The Lord's Supper cannot compare to any meal when it comes to the bounty of dinner tables, but I would forsake all eating and drinking but to taste of Jesus' body and drink of His blood, or so the New Man of faith would declare. Fortunately, He gives no command to forsake all meals.

"Get behind me," Jesus calls out to you. "Take up your cross and follow me," Jesus tells you. (cf. Matthew 16:24) He leads into the way of truth and life, for He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. (cf. John 14:6) By His Holy Spirit, Jesus leads you here, where He is for you, and gives you from the scraps that fall from His table, and these are the fullness of God for you: forgiveness, life, and salvation. Scraps, because he gives of His fullness to you hidden in means. Mere water is a washing of regeneration and renewing. Mere words from a mere man are a gracious forgiveness of your sins as if God Himself were speaking it. Mere bread and wine are the very body and blood of the Son of God, given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. And these are what they are for you because the Word of God makes them such for you and to you!

And you, by way of the New Man of faith you have been given, you follow like little dogs to this hallowed hall where Jesus meets you, full of grace and truth, in Word and Sacrament. And you, by that faith that you have been given from God, receive Jesus who has come to you—and to you who receive Him He gives the right to become the children of God, for you believe in His name: YHWH saves. (cf. John 1:12) He saves you; Jesus is your Savior! Because of what He does for you, He no longer calls you little dogs—the Canaanite woman is no dog—but children: sons of God. And if you are sons (and you are because God calls you that), then you are heirs of God through Christ (cf. Galatians 4:7), who came and shed His blood on the cross and died for you to set you free from bondage to the serpent—Jesus has crushed the serpent's head; therefore, you are forgiven for all of your sins!

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.