

The grace, mercy, and peace of Christ Jesus rest upon each and every one of you this day.

“It’s not right to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs.” This is how Jesus answers the Canaanite woman who comes to Him seeking help for her daughter, who was severely oppressed by a demon. She comes to Jesus, an outsider; a Canaanite woman (that’s just about as low as you can get in 1st century Palestinian culture), and she calls out to Jesus, “Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David!” She knows what the Scriptures say about the coming Messiah, and she recognizes all of it as fulfilled in the work and person of Jesus Christ. This is why she boldly goes to Him seeking mercy, the inferior goes to the superior, not to highlight herself and her accomplishments and her self-perceived sense of holiness and entitlement, but to call upon her Lord’s grace and love. She knows she doesn’t deserve anything from Him. She doesn’t ask for what she deserves. She asks that He be gracious and merciful, and give her that which she doesn’t deserve at all.

What I find so amusing here in all this, and it’s often lost or overlooked or downplayed, is the fact that the woman never balks. Jesus basically treats her like human debris, and she just takes it. She comes begging for help, and Jesus makes a point of saying out loud to the disciples, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” That right there is important (and so often missed). Jesus wasn’t even talking to her when He said that! He acted like she didn’t even exist. He was talking to His disciples. “Help her? Give her what she wants so she’ll go away and leave us alone? Why should I help her? I was only sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. I wasn’t sent to help nasty Canaanites.” This woman doesn’t bat an eyelash; doesn’t miss a beat. She hears Christ’s blunt truth, and she hits her knees in the dust before Him. “Lord, help me.” Jesus looks her in the eyes and says, “It is not

right to the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." Jesus just called her a lowly dog! That's one of the lowest, cruelest things you can say.

And how does this woman respond to such perceived verbal and emotional abuse? "You're right, Lord, but even the dogs get to eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table." She doesn't disagree. She doesn't balk or return the insult with an insult of her own. She doesn't fight back. She doesn't even collect the scraps of her dignity and turn around and walk away empty-handed. "Forget it. I'll try something else. I don't need this." Nope. She stays right there and actually agrees with Jesus!

Now, before we go any further, it is important to talk about WHY she allows herself to be subjected to such humiliation and degradation. Many a person has declared that this woman stuck around and endured so much misery out of love for her daughter. I don't think there's a single mom here who can't relate to this idea. Moms who love their kids would walk through fire and take on all kinds of misery if it meant that their babies would be made better and kept safe. Is that what was going on here with this woman? Yes! But...there's more to it than a love that only a mother could have. Jesus didn't commend her motherly sense of duty. He commended her faith.

As I said at the beginning of this sermon, this woman knew her Scriptures. Remember: She didn't refer to Jesus as "rabbi" or "miracle worker," which is how most people knew Jesus. Most people (including some that were very close to Jesus) looked to Him and didn't see anything other than the carpenter's son from Nazareth, who could do some pretty cool and amazing tricks, like healing sick people or turning water into wine or raising dead people to life. But...that's NOT how this woman saw Jesus!

“Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me!” She gets it! She knows EXACTLY what she is asking and who she is asking. She seeks mercy. She seeks almighty God’s grace. Her daughter is crushed under sin and evil, and this mom comes to God-in-the-flesh because she knows that He can and will put this evil down. She knew that, and she believed it...even as she was being crushed and beat down and humiliated. She never lost hope. She never let go. She never wavered in her faith.

And it’s this Word and Promise of God that she trusted in so whole-heartedly that made her bold to confess her reality to her Lord and Savior when confronted with the truth of her condition. She agreed with Jesus when He made the statement about throwing the children’s bread to lowly dogs. That’s what it means to confess. She says the same thing...but then she holds her Lord’s feet to the fire, so to speak. She knows also that her Lord has spoken at length about being gracious and merciful and abounding in steadfast love. She reminds God of His Word and promise. She trusts that God will do and will be everything that He has said He is and does. That’s faith!

This is why this particular Sunday is known as “reminiscere Sunday.” Our Scripture lessons for today all focus on the certainty of God’s holy Word. These lessons all focus on holding fast to God and reminiscing; that is, faithfully remembering all that He has already spoken about Himself, His grace, His mercy, and His love for us. Even in the midst of sorrows, be it a dislocated hip like Jacob, or a Roman prison cell like Paul, or having to face terrible difficulties and worries and insults and barbs and what seems like the whole world is against you...even when God seems to be against you...even in the midst of these sorrows and shadowy valleys of death, we have God’s sure and certain promise that He is with us always; always loving us, never leaving us or forsaking us, always providing for us all that we need for this body and life. By virtue of your baptism into Christ and His death

and resurrection, you bear His victorious name upon your head and your heart, marking you as one who is completely redeemed in the blood of Jesus. Hold fast to this fact. Remember this blessed fact. You are NOT being punished for your sin, even though life might seem pretty dark and depressing and punishing at times. God is not angry with you. God is at peace with you. Jesus was punished for your sins—all of them—so that you would never have to be punished for them. That's love. That's love that ONLY our heavenly Father can have.

May you never forget or doubt this blessed reality. May this blessed reality of God's love, grace, and peace be your confidence, your confession, and your joy now and into all eternity. Amen.