**Matthew 15:21-28 August 16, 2020**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text for this morning comes from our Gospel lesson, Matthew chapter 15 here re-reading these words. “And he answered “It is not right to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs.” She said “Yes Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.” Then Jesus answered her, “O woman, great is your faith!” This is our text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Do you ever get tired of phone calls or letters in the mail asking you to help some group of people? I don’t mean to give the impression that you’re heartless or cruel, but do you experience a kind of, compassion fatigue when it comes to requests for help from anonymous people and organizations? I’m talking about the times when it’s the 3rd or 4th foreign number call to your phone or to your house in one day. When you hear the phone ring and inwardly are dreading picking it up because you know what it is. You pick up, hear an automated message, and wait patiently without even listening until you can push a button to get your name off the list. You don’t hear the details of the advertisement, or the specific plea for money or assistance from the company, you don’t even know what they do. Or perhaps you drive into a larger city and see a homeless individual with a sign, and after 2 or 3 intersections with a homeless person there, you avoid making eye contact. You ignore them. You don’t even read the sign they are holding. These are examples of compassion fatigue and they are commonplace in our world where everyone seems to need something. But when it comes to asking for help or even in a sense begging for others to give you something, let me ask you this: Would you rather be the one who is able to help or the one who has to ask for help? Things are completely different based on the situation you are in. Because it’s actually a privilege to be able to help others in the name of Jesus 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 kneel before God and pray for his mercy. That was also the situation of the mother in our text today, and how wonderful it is to learn from Jesus’ final response to her that Jesus abundantly feeds us the life-giving, sin-forgiving, soul-healing crumbs that we need.

A mother seeks help, yet why would she be in a position of begging? The reason is she is a Canaanite. This Canaanite woman comes to Jesus crying, “Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David.” This is amazing because 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 his son marry a Canaanite. Yet this woman comes to Jesus, calls him Lord and Son of David, and begs him to help her daughter because her daughter is oppressed by a demon. She recognizes his authority and that he is God’s Messiah. It is a remarkable sign and show of faith to even have approached Jesus in the first place and it shows her desperation. This woman is frantic and is truly a beggar when it comes to Christ, she has no claim to ask these things of the Messiah.

This woman has no power or authority over demons which means that the mother can’t in anyway fix the situation herself. She is a hopeless beggar before Christ and we would expect the kindhearted Jesus to reach down, restore her daughter, wish her well and commend her faith right from the start, yet Jesus hears this woman’s pleas, and doesn’t even dignify her words with anything. He doesn’t say a word.

It’s the disciples who intervene for the woman who continues and persistently begs Jesus to help. Eventually the disciples ask Jesus to send her away, probably with the healing that she has asked for just so they can have some peace. It’s similar to finally giving in and handing over money to a homeless person you’d see every single day on a regular commute, or finally giving money to the same number that calls over and over again just so they won’t call anymore! That’s the disciples plan. “Send her away” they say, “for she is crying out after us.” Yet Jesus doesn’t give in. “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” He is telling them why he hasn’t healed her daughter. She has no standing as a child of Israel. She has no right to ask him anything, she is not part of the kingdom, she is not a member of God’s holy people, she is the opposite, a foreigner and enemy of God.

And yet, despite her status, despite Jesus saying nothing to her, despite the disciples trying to dismiss her, despite Jesus himself pointing out that she is not one of the beloved flock, she continues. She keeps begging Jesus. She kneels in front of him, really the Greek shows that this is more of a worship stance, and cries out in many ways, the same words that we utter every Sunday here in God’s house. “Lord, help me” she says, or as we sometimes sing, and today we say, “Lord, have mercy upon us.” The Kyrie Eleison, with the Greek word for Lord being what she uses. She again shows her faith, but hear how Jesus responds. “It is not right to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs.” We could almost get the impression that Jesus didn’t come to Tyre to save women such as this. That he wasn’t there to start a ministry or to do miracles. If there was ever a statement that would dismiss someone and be a firm command to take a hint it’s this. We don’t take bread and throw it to dogs, we don’t give miracles to enemies of God.

She says to this “Yes Lord.” Amazingly she agrees, she doesn’t turn on Jesus and start angrily lashing out at him, which is again a remarkable sign of her faith and her understanding. A beggar doesn’t have the right to even ask, they are begging which means they have nothing to offer and they don’t deserve the item that they are asking for. She confesses that Jesus is right, but that in any kind of meal, especially if we’re talking about breaking bread together, meaning to literally grab and rip apart bread, as anyone who has worked at a restaurant or hosted a large family dinner knows, the floor gets messy and there’s crumbs. And all she wants is a crumb from the table. “Feed the children O Son of David, and all I want is a crumb, and I’m not even worthy of that.”

Jesus responds “O woman, great is your faith.” Which is a recognition that from the beginning he saw the evidence of her faith, that he understood what this woman was asking for, and so she receives the crumb. Her daughter is healed, freed from the oppression of a demon, and we know that this was a terrible thing for anyone to endure as demons would hurt their host and also cause great division in someone’s house. Jesus came and gave to this woman the bread of life, even if it was just in the form of a crumb, the leftovers, because that is enough.

And so we find ourselves in this story in the begging woman, for we too are nothing but beggars when it comes to God. O that we would receive a crumb, for we are sinners, we are as Canaanites, we are enemies of God because of what we have done wrong. We sin, and then we have the gall to come to God asking for help? We have no right. No standing to demand anything of Jesus and we deserve nothing from him. How dare we think that we can go to Christ and ask for anything, we who have denied him, we who have openly rebelled against him, we who are his enemies because of our lives of sin. We who turn our backs on those who beg us, who come to us for aid, who reach out to us in the same situation we are in when it comes to salvation, and we turn a blind eye, we turn a deaf ear, we don’t even dignify their calls with a response.

We are possessed by sin, we are sorely oppressed by Satan and never left alone from the temptation to sin. Satan doesn’t leave us alone, and succeeds in getting us to sin. He turns things upside down in our minds. He makes bad seem good and good seem bad. Satan himself tormented the Canaanite girl and in the same way we are tormented by sin and the shame and guilt of giving into temptation. This sin torments us, we feel the same way as the girl in that we can’t get rest or relaxation, we are constantly fighting it and yet we give in. We pray for relief but seem to only get the response of silence. We suffer and wonder if God even cares.

But again, when it comes to God and salvation, we are beggars. We are in need. We cannot solve our own problems. We can’t fix sin or defeat the devil, we aren’t strong enough or capable. We can’t get free. We can’t stop his torments, we can’t get rid or forgive our own sins and therefore we can’t get ourselves to heaven. So we are beggars, whether we want to be or not, we don’t have the luxury of being the ones to give salvation, or to refrain from asking. Just as the woman couldn’t heal her daughter and this was the only option, even if she was going to beg for it, we too seek salvation from God as beggars.

Which means that we beg of a God who should, by every right, answer us with silence. But we do not come to a vengeful and angry God, and we do not beg from a God of hate, we beg of a God who is merciful. The Canaanite woman cries, “Have mercy on me” Kyrie Eleison. Lord, have mercy upon us. She trusts that the Messiah is merciful, and she’s right. She has come to the source of healing, and while anyone else would have sent her away, Jesus hears her cries. And he hears ours as well. The same Son of David who went to the cross, who suffered the separation from God and being forsaken for us, has taken away our sin even though we are so undeserving. We too beg of the same merciful God, the God of grace, the God whose chief or primary quality is love, and the God who died for you.

We beg of the Lord who is able to help us. Not only is God inclined to help us already because his nature is love but he is also able to help us. He is a God of power and might. He is a God who hears our prayers and who answers them. Our God is able to help us. When we cry out to him, he hears us, no matter what is bothering us or weighing us down. He is able to help you and wants to because he loves you even when you are his enemy.

In our lives the blessings that God gives are as crumbs that continually fall to us, because he makes us his children. All we need is a crumb to be satisfied, for this is the very bread of life given by God. Every crumb contains mercy and grace of God. Every crumb heals. Every crumb satisfies. Every crumb forgives.

It’s easy to become jaded from those who constantly asking things from us, especially in this world where begging can be done on the phone, in an e-mail, or text message. We turn a blind eye to the beggars around us, but for just one moment, look in the mirror and see your own state. When it comes to salvation, 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!

Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding keep our hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen.