

A Crumby Gospel

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Wall Street United Church

Sunday, August 16th, 2026

Matthew 15: 21-28 (NIV)

The Faith of a Canaanite Woman

Leaving that place, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is demon-possessed and suffering terribly."

Jesus did not answer a word. So his disciples came to him and urged him, "Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us."

He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel."

The woman came and knelt before him. "Lord, help me!" she said.

He replied, "It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs." "Yes it is, Lord," she said. "Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table."

Then Jesus said to her, "Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted." And her daughter was healed at that moment.

Sermon

But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me." He answered, It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." [Matthew 15: 25-

I've been thinking about the crumbs that are a part of our Communion sacraments...small blocks of bread, with crumbs, of course. Especially if it's gluten free! We place this bread into our cupped hands during Communion saying, "*The body of Christ, broken for you.*" The body of Christ broken for me. For me! I received crumbs from the Master's table — bread and wine, body and blood. It didn't take much. There was no three-course sit-down dinner. A morsel and a few crumbs are enough, yes more than enough, at Jesus' table.

We need this "crumby" gospel, especially when the world seems crummy. We need this taste of Jesus to sharpen our appetites for more, and to sustain us and remind us again and again of what really matters and that we belong, every one of us. We need to come to the table, to Jesus' feet with all our sorrow, pain, hang-ups, addictions, faults, isolation and all the rest of our baggage. And, yes, even the little pups and aged mutts begging from under the table get something from the master. No one is excluded.

Back to the story. So, this Canaanite woman comes to Jesus and she has this daughter who is demon possessed. And she cries out for mercy, she cries out in hope. She sounds almost hysterical...Jesus is her last hope. "*Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David.*"

For many of us listening to the story over 2000 years later, the idea of being demon possessed is like something out of a horror movie and maybe stuff and nonsense. What was the child's problem? Some may guess along the lines of a spiritual warfare, literally a demon, while others might consider that she had a mental illness or other intellectual or physical impairment. In the end it is hard for

us to say, but I don't think any of us would question that the child was in desperate straits. However, her mother's plea seems to fall on deaf ears, and I think we are again surprised (as I have been) that Jesus' answer is just....silence.

Even worse are the disciples who want Jesus to send her away, poor things, "*She keeps shouting after us.*" [V. 23b] What a nuisance! They want to exclude her and banish her problems from their presence. So why do Jesus' disciples get all lathered up over this Canaanite woman? You'd think by now they would have realized that Jesus is not out to impress the religious elite or to maintain the status quo...indeed, quite the opposite!

Nonetheless, put in context, this silence would have been quite a reasonable response for Jesus to make...and understanding *why* means we need to know who the Canaanites were. There is a little story in Genesis found in Chapter 9, verses 20 to 27...This is just after Noah has saved his family and the animals on the ark. Noah gets drunk and shames himself by collapsing naked in his tent. His son Ham comes across his dad splayed out on the floor of his tent. But, rather than simply covering him, up Ham ducks outside and tells his two brothers about his Father's state. They enter the tent and without looking at Noah's nakedness, and they cover him up.

Now it's a bit of an obscure story but it is important for this encounter. Because what Noah does in response to hearing how Ham had dealt with his nakedness is to curse Ham's son Canaan. (Poor Canaan, what had he ever done to Noah??) Canaan was now to be the lowest of slaves and the history of the Old Testament bears this curse out. The Canaanites were scorned by the Israelites, the

unfortunate outcome of Noah's drunken rave. However, this is why, when Jesus answers the disciples request, his words seem harsh and uncompromising. He addresses the disciples saying, *"I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."* [V. 24b] (Remember that they are a tribe, not a nation...!)

It's the last response we might expect because Jesus has just delivered a vivid object lesson about the source of human filth and rottenness....Ouch! It's to be found in Matthew chapter 15 verses 1 through 20... Oh, what dark hearts we hide beneath the clothes of respectability and righteousness! Jesus lists several of the dark and dirty things: evil intentions, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander. You get the idea. Not keeping nit-picky rules, Jesus abandons hollow traditions and refuses to get hung-up on religious tradition – not washing your hands before we eat, for example, doesn't really make us "unclean" or outside of God's love.

I wonder how this encounter in the gospel lesson really happened? We have the words on the page, but we don't have the tone of voice, the looks, or the whole scene before us. When the woman appeals to Jesus he doesn't answer her. So, what hangs in that silence? The disciples are quick to fill it by urging that Jesus send *'this inconvenient truth of an outsider'* away. His next words, *"I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel,"* must have sounded just fine to the annoyed and embarrassed disciples. I wonder though, about a lesson for them in the words that they overlooked. After all, just as we do, they often overlooked both the obvious and the obscure.

Yet even in the midst of this rather 'crummy' situation, the woman will not be deterred from holding out her hand for a crumb from Jesus. She instinctively knows she belongs at the table. That, beloved, is great faith. This outsider woman gets it. She understands the lesson that you don't hoard grace and that you aren't stingy with love and healing. A crumb from Jesus makes all the difference in the world.

Our world continues to reel from global events. Between wars, conflicts, famines, floods, plagues, homelessness and ridiculous people in power...sounds like remnants of the ancient world! All this is enough for any of us, but add to that the usual list of prayer needs and human brokenness and pain...

So today, I am handing out this crumby gospel to you. May these crumbs of abundant love, grace, and salvation fill your hands and satisfy your appetite. I do this because we believe that Jesus is *still* all about the business of working miracles, changing lives, and ushering in the reconciliation of this world. Come to the table of God's love, all of you...to the warmth and strength of Jesus. We are like the daughter and we need help. The good news is that Jesus reaches out and heals this girl, a girl who had not done anything in and of herself to look for that healing. She receives the gift of a new chance and new life and is restored to her mother and her community.

I think about the weeks that have passed and I have engaged in personal stories of pain and illness and unspeakable loss...felt smothered by global situations that are staggering. Yet, this is our story, it is my story and it is your story, that Jesus has reached into our lives with just such a grace. So receive this good news and live it

so that others might rejoice and share in the hope we have. We have been invited...every last rag-tag, gimp and grumpy one! Let us hold out our hands for these precious crumbs and this very good news.

Thanks be to God.

Please pray with me. Loving God, you have made us worthy to accept even the crumbs from your table and find that they are enough, that we are enough in your eyes. We thank you, in Jesus' name. Amen.