

We cannot get into the head of Jesus. We can get into the heads of His disciples somewhat. And we are given a peek into the heart of this woman. As for Jesus, we do not know why He treats this woman as He does. He ignores her. He is completely silent to her pleading. It's as if she is praying to an idol which has neither ears to hear nor a mouth to speak. Jesus is not an idol. He has both ears and a mouth. But for this woman, He may as well be a statue made of stone, for He answers her not a word.

His disciples most certainly do have ears. And their ears are sick and tired of this woman's cries. "*Send her away!*" they beg Jesus. "Just give her what she wants so she will leave us alone!" Along with ears, they also have mouths with which to speak. And their mouths consistently say the same thing. "*Send her away!*" "*Send them away!*" They said this of the five thousand men, plus women and children, when the day was nearly over. "*Send them away to go...and buy food for themselves.*" "*Send them away!*" "*Send her away!*" It's fairly obvious what is in the heads of the disciples. They do not understand the mercy of God.

What is in your head, and in mine? Do we understand Jesus' mercy? This woman does not deserve mercy. She is a Canaanite. Not a Jew. Not one of God's people. A woman whose ancestors worshiped idols, who fought against God's people when Joshua led them into the land of Canaan, and who were to be exterminated so they would not infect the people of God with their false gods and wicked way of life.

This woman should never have been born. And yet, "*Look!*" writes St. Matthew in our text. Here she is following after Jesus, pleading with Him to show mercy to her, refusing to accept His silence. This woman simply will not quit. How long this goes on, we do not know. But long enough to greatly irritate the disciples.

It is a shameful thing for any of us to act like the disciples here in our text. It is not for us to judge others, whether they are deserving of mercy. This woman was beneath the disciples in their opinion. They belonged with Jesus; she did not. They were God's people; she was not.

When we judge others, we automatically judge ourselves. And our judgment of ourselves is that we are better than, more deserving of, whoever it is that we are judging.

It appears that Jesus is judging this woman. First, He ignores her as if she doesn't even exist. Then, when she comes and kneels down before Him, He calls her a dog. How harsh He appears here.

Sometimes He is this harsh with us. Some of you have shared with me, in the past, how God had been ignoring you. He had treated you in the way He treats this woman. How tempting it is for us to act, not like this woman does however, but to give up, to convince ourselves that God wants nothing to do with us, even that He is against us. And if God is not on our side, what is left for us?

Some of you, right now, may feel that you are at the end of your rope. That's just how this woman feels. There is no one who can help her, except Jesus. But even He is refusing to help her.

But she has faith, great faith says Jesus. She has great faith, not because of the size of her faith, but because she has faith in Jesus, and in Jesus alone.

I'm convinced that she would have followed Him, pleading with Him, until her voice gave out and the soles of her sandals were in tatters. And even beyond that.

She would have heard of how Jesus fed the five thousand just days before, and that there were twelve baskets of food leftover. She did not need the meal of bread and fish. All she needed was what was left over.

She seizes, therefore, upon Jesus' words to her. "You are right, Lord, in calling me a dog. I agree with You wholeheartedly. And this is why, like a little dog, I have been following You. I do not deserve a place at the table with God's people. My place is beneath the table. And since the children are fed at the table, the scraps and crumbs will fall down to dogs like me."

And she is right. There is such an abundance of mercy within the heart of God, that it spills out and over the table for the dogs.

And such are you, and such am I. We are dogs. We are Gentiles, not Jews. We do not share in the blood of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But we do share in their faith. You are baptized in that Faith. And by faith you gather here, like dogs, waiting for the crumbs to fall from the table. But even one crumb is eternal life. One drop of Jesus' blood, shed upon the cross for all sinners, is forgiveness, life, and salvation.

The thing God does best of all is to show mercy. Sometimes the way He is merciful is by not giving us what we want. Sometimes He waits to show mercy, as with this woman. But always His heart is full of mercy for weak, sinful, little dogs like us.

How easy it is for us to think that God is done showing mercy to us because of a dreadful sin that we have done. No, my friends. No sin of yours can keep God's mercy away from you. That's the thing about mercy. No one deserves it. Not the children at the table, not the dogs beneath the table.

But God has mercy on all sinners. Yes, even on you. He forgives you, friend. He forgives all your sins.

Never quit. It is at the end of the rope – it is there where you will see God's mercy. It is for you. Amen.