

Matthew 15:21-28

A family that keeps a pet in the house usually has a clean floor beneath the dinner table. When the family members sit down to eat, Rover knows exactly where to go. He parks it on the floor next to the chairs where the children sit. They're the ones who enjoy tossing him their scraps. And if the main dish is liver and onions, Rover is going to feast sumptuously because the children may give him more than just their scraps when mom and dad aren't watching.

The disciples of Jesus, unlike such children, were very much against the whole idea of feeding the pet dogs from the table. Even though they themselves were well-fed, they were not about to give their dogs any leftover scraps from their plates. And if a morsel of food dropped onto the floor, they were quick to pick it up and throw it away before their hungry pets had a chance to devour it.

The evidence of this is in our text in Matthew 15. A woman with a daughter who was demon-possessed was following Jesus and His disciples begging Him for a morsel of food. All she wanted was a scrap that fell from the table. "Please help me," she cried. "Please send the demon out of my daughter." She wasn't asking for the contents of the entire plate. Just a morsel; just a word from Jesus to drive the demon away—that's all she wanted. Jesus' disciples, however, wanted her to receive nothing. "Send her away!" they begged Jesus. "She keeps crying out after us... (tell her to get lost!)"

It's not as if Jesus wasn't able to help this poor woman. They knew He could. He had already helped thousands of such people. And it's not as if Jesus was going to run out of miracles. He had plenty to spare. And it's not as though anyone else would receive less help if Jesus helped this woman. No one would ever miss the little morsel of food that fell off the table for her. So why were Jesus' disciples so much against this woman? Why were they so adamant that Jesus send her away empty-handed? If it had been their daughter needing help, they would have pleaded with Jesus to show mercy. If this woman had been their sister, or a dear friend, or even a fellow Jew, they would have asked Jesus to give her the help she was seeking.

The disciples were against her receiving even a morsel of help from Jesus because this woman was a Canaanite. She was not one of God's chosen people. God's people, in fact, under Joshua were supposed to have destroyed her ancestors when they conquered the land of Canaan. They let some of them live, however...but Jesus' disciples were wanting to make absolutely certain that none of these wretched Canaanite people received anything from their Lord and Master.

Do you have a "Canaanite woman" in your neighborhood? Is there someone you know—a neighbor, a coworker, a schoolmate—whom you are against? Someone who you think does not deserve the same blessings from God which He puts on your plate? Because that's what it boils down to. Such people, in our minds, are less deserving than we are. Jesus' disciples believed that this woman deserved nothing good. Not a plate full of food. Not a slice of bread. Not even a crumb that fell off the plate onto the floor. They did not want Jesus to drive the demon out of her daughter. They wanted her daughter to suffer at the hands of Satan. "Go to hell!" is what they were, in effect, telling this woman. "You and

your daughter deserve no help at all from Jesus; you can both burn forever in hell!” That’s really what they were saying by their words.

When your neighbor purposely cuts you off in traffic, what thoughts enter your mind? When someone at work or school drags your name through the mud and makes you look bad, do you pray for their eternal salvation, or do you hope that they get what they deserve? Are we really any different from Jesus’ disciples? We have our favorites, and we have our “not-so-favorites.” There are those people that we admire (and we include ourselves on that list); there are those that we get along with; and there are those people whom we look down on. But if there are people that we know who don’t deserve much good from the Lord, what makes us think that we do? Did you really mean it when you confessed with me as our service began this morning, that you desire God to be merciful to you because you and I are unworthy sinners? How can an unworthy sinner look down upon another unworthy sinner? Somehow Jesus’ disciples managed to do it...and they did it because they were lacking faith. “Great is your faith,” Jesus said. But He did not speak these words to His disciples; He spoke them to the poor woman. She was showing her faith in the Lord. The disciples were showing just the opposite.

Are there any people of faith here at Christ Lutheran Congregation in Augusta? If so, then they will resemble the woman in this story, not Jesus’ disciples. She clung to Jesus even though no one wanted her to. Not one person was encouraging her. The disciples were all against her. Yet she fixed her eyes on the Lord. Does your spouse support you in the Faith? Are your children or grandchildren with you on this? Do your friends encourage you to be a faithful Christian? This woman had no such support. Yet, in faith she clung to Christ. Often times we’re just the opposite of this woman. Just one negative comment from someone, and we quit coming to church altogether. One member or one pastor says one word against us, and immediately we walk away from the Lord.

Jesus Himself was saying things to this woman which seemed to agree with His disciples. He told her: I was not sent to help people like you. He called her a little dog; not someone deserving of sitting at the table, but a pet dog which begs for the crumbs that fall off the table. But she had faith. Even though it looked like she would receive nothing, she still clung to Jesus. She did not disagree with Him. She said: Yes, Lord, I am a dog...and that’s why I will stay put with you until you give me the crumb that I need.

What about us? How do you and I react when we hear words from the Lord which hurt us? Do we, like this woman, agree and say, “Yes, Lord, you are correct that I am a worthless sinner...a dog...and I deserve nothing but your punishment both now and forever.” Or do we disagree with Him and point out that others are much worse than we are? That we really haven’t been all that bad? But faith does not disagree with what God has said. Faith accepts His Word as the truth no matter what.

This woman had a great faith because she looked to no one else except Jesus alone. She did not give up and say, “Oh, well, I’ll find someone else to help me.” There was no one else! She believed this with all her heart. Only Jesus could save her daughter. She refused to turn away from Him. Do we also cling to Jesus as she did, or do we give up too easily and turn our eyes away from Christ and His Word and Sacraments to a “savior” of our own making?

Friend, become like this poor woman. Confess with her: I am a dog. I do not deserve even one blessing from God. I deserve to spend eternity in hell. I am a wretched and worthless sinner. Confess these words not in defeat, but in faith. Faith which looks to Christ. Faith which clings to Him no matter how bad things look in life. Faith which believes, “Even though I am a dog, God in mercy gives to me what I need.”

Jesus helped that woman. Her daughter was made well. Right here, today, Jesus is here to help you. “Come up,” He says, “To My Table. I have prepared this meal of grace for you. Are you a worthless sinner...a dog? Come and eat; come and drink. This is My body, My blood, given and shed for you.”

He does not search your heart to find hidden and secret sins. He does not search your past to see how bad you have been. He gives you here today in His word of pardon, every rich blessing that He has. Every one of you He forgives right here and now. There isn't one sinner here that He drives away from His grace. His mercy abounds to each of you. No plate of liver and onions here—He gives you the banquet feast of eternal life. Here in His words of life He places into your hungry ears the very gift of heaven itself.

Do we deserve all this? No, we deserve just the opposite. But this story shows us that God is merciful. He loves, more than anything else, to give sinners like you and me not what we deserve, but the very best that He has to give. You see, Jesus already took what you deserve. Jesus suffered at the hands of Satan for you. Jesus was shown no mercy at all. The powers of hell had their way with him, and that is why He gives you heaven. That is why God forgives you. The cross where your Savior died is where the meal of eternal life was prepared. Here today in His Word and Sacraments is where this meal is given to you.

In a few minutes you and I, like little dogs, will come up to Jesus' Table because it's meal-time and we know where to go. Our place is here with Christ, for He died for dogs like us. And He gives to you not just crumbs, but forgiveness, and life, and salvation. He gives you the full meal—He gives you Himself. What more could a dog want? It's all here for you for Jesus' sake. Amen.