

The 12th Sunday after Pentecost

“God’s gracious promises for the ‘little dogs’ -you and me!” (Matthew 15:25-28)

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Rev. Ed Weber

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, our text for this 12<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost is from our Gospel reading, Matthew 15:25-28.

**“Then she came and worshiped Him, saying, “Lord, help me!” But He answered and said, “It is not good to take the children’s bread and throw it to the little dogs.” And she said, “Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their masters’ table.” Then Jesus answered and said to her, “O woman, great is your faith! Let it be to you as you desire.” And her daughter was healed from that very hour.**

So far the text...

Jesus always has a great plan. We might not understand it at first, but when it is revealed, we are left astounded. A couple of weeks ago, we saw how He fed over 5000 people with a few loaves of bread and some fish. Jesus put His disciples to the test by telling them to feed the people, which quickly elicited a despondent response, “how?”. And yet, Jesus performed a miracle and made the impossible “how” a reality. What could Jesus do with a few crumbs that fall from the Master’s table?

And last week we heard how Jesus allowed His disciples to be tested in the storm. They were helpless against the wind and in great danger. Yet, Jesus had a plan to humble them to in order for them to believe in Him. And they did! As the storm immediately calmed when Jesus walked on the water into their boat, they exclaimed, “You truly are the Son of God!” It was a test that brought forth a confession of faith!

Was the Canaanite woman going through a storm in her life too? Did Jesus have a plan for her? Was this not a humbling testing of her faith to bring forth a strong confession of faith also? Did Jesus’ plan also include a Gentile woman?

Back in June, when we were in Matthew chapter 10, we heard how Jesus sent out His 12 apostles with these instructions.

**“5 These twelve Jesus sent out and commanded them, saying: “Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter a city of the Samaritans. 6 But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”**

It doesn't sound like Gentiles were part of Jesus' plan, does it? And, Jesus repeats that plan in our Gospel today, doesn't He, when He responds to the woman's cry for help.

**“I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”**

But, you could misinterpret Jesus' plan if you didn't read all of Scripture and focused on just one verse. For Jesus also says in John 10,

**“16 And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd.”**

Who are those other sheep that Jesus so much wants to bring into His fold? The Gentiles, of course! This was beautifully prophesied in the Old Testament. Two Sunday's ago we heard for example from Isaiah 55 these words, didn't we?

**“Surely you shall call a nation you do not know,  
And nations who do not know you shall run to you,”**

Gentiles would come to the believing people of Israel and there would be one flock of Jews and Gentiles. But God is a God of order. There's a plan. First Jesus seeks out the lost sheep of Israel and then the lost Gentiles.

Again in Romans chapter 2, looking at all of Scripture, not just one verse, we get the big picture that the disciples weren't getting who wanted to send the Canaanite woman away.

**“to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness—indignation and wrath, 9 tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the [c]Greek; 10 but**

**glory, honor, and peace to everyone who works what is good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. 11 For there is no partiality with God.”**

But didn't Jesus seem to be showing partiality, Himself, by not answering the Canaanite woman? And then He seems to be turning her away by saying that she isn't part of the lost sheep of Israel? What's going on? Well, Jesus never forgets His promises. His plan isn't an either/or plan, but a both/and!

What's happening is a test of the woman's faith. She had already called Him her Lord and Messiah. "Lord, Son of David". She confesses her faith in Him, but Jesus wants to strengthen it even more.

Whenever you catch a flight there's always an order to board the plane, isn't there? You wait your turn until your group number is called. And Jesus gives the Canaanite woman this hope. You're going to get on the flight, but your group number is last. Jesus says it this way.

**“It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs.”**

You don't have priority boarding. You don't get to sit at the table and eat the children's bread. The little dogs don't get a plate. Now, in today's society, if someone called you a "little dog", that might actually get people angry. You're calling me "what"? And, she could have said a few choice words and walked away. But she didn't call the police or throw something at Jesus. She humbled herself.

**““Yes, Lord,”** That's true. I don't deserve to be at the Master's table. I am a sinner and cannot help my daughter who is overpowered by an evil demon.

**“yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their masters' table.”**

There's a "yet". There's something for me too! A crumb! Because I'm a believer, I'm in the Master's house even though I'm a little dog, a Gentile. But that's more than enough for me! A crumb of Your mercy will save my daughter!

And Jesus loved to hear His promises repeated to Him. He loves to hear you and me admit our unworthiness to Him, our sinfulness, our humble hearts, but also our firm belief in His promises. There's a crumb of mercy for you and me, little dogs, Gentile believers.

**“Great is your faith!”** Jesus said to the woman. **“Let it be to you as you desire.”**  
**And her daughter was healed from that very hour.”**

Priority boarding is yours! Women with small children can board first is the way it's done in airports. Woman, with a demon- possessed child, welcome aboard, your daughter is healed.

You see, Jesus' plan is always a both/and plan. He died for all people. God loves all people. When He calls us “little dogs”, it's a beautiful nickname. In Spanish, people love to give family members nicknames. You can call a loved one, “gordo, flaco, cabezon, cacheton, pollito, mariposa, puma, viejo, vieja, or many others. And it's received out of love. Jesus calls us pet dogs. And how we love our pets! They're part of the family! Children love to purposely let food fall on the floor from their plates so that their pet can enjoy a treat.

Yes, God also calls us His sheep. And He is our Good Shepherd. He feeds us with the green pastures of His Word and Sacraments. He gives us His very body in with and under the bread and His very blood, in, with and under the wine today, for our forgiveness of sins. He loves us to come to His table often because we are tested so often in this world of sin. We need His strengthening love for our souls that He gives to us at His table.

This is all part of God's gracious plan to you! He gives you mercy that you also would give mercy to others. We don't know who God has called to be a part of His sheepfold. The Canaanite woman had heard of Jesus, His miracles and teaching. The woman came looking for Jesus, but the reality was that Jesus went looking for her and brought her into His sheepfold through His teaching.

In the verse right before our epistle in Romans 11, Paul calls the Gentiles a wild olive tree that was grafted in by the grace of God. Unbelieving Jewish branches were broken off and wild branches were grafted in and nourished by the root, Jesus Christ. And Paul prayed that the unbelieving Jews would be provoked to

jealousy to humble themselves and be grafted in again. Instead of sending people away like the disciples wanted to do, God wants us to have mercy on all. For only He knows who He calls to be a part of His kingdom.

**“32 For God has committed them all to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all. 33 Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!”**

God wants all people to recognize their disobedience and repent like the Canaanite woman so He might have mercy on all. Baptized child of God, little dog of the house of God, Jesus has had mercy on you! And as you have confessed your faith in Him and come to receive His gracious promises, God also tells you “Great is your faith in the great crumbs of mercy you have received!” You have priority boarding in God’s Kingdom!

Amen.

**“The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” Amen. (Philippians 4:7)**