

Rev. Dan Welch Pentecost 12 8-20-23 Text- Matthew 15: 21- 28

Who are you? In any good story, movie, or book, one that you really get into, one in which you're caught up in the drama, you see yourself as one of the characters in that story. As a boy, I really liked the original Star Wars movies. There were all kinds of characters in those stories; good guys and bad guys, young people and old, aliens and humans. My favorite character though was Han Solo. He was the risk-taking rogue pilot with his trusty laser blaster at his side to shoot any bad guys who got in his way. He was sometimes the reluctant hero, but he was still a hero and as a kid I wanted to grow up to be like him. In the movies, when Han Solo was in danger, I felt some of the danger too. I liked to put myself in his place.

Who are **you** in this account between Jesus and the Canaanite woman? A woman's child is demon possessed. She's suffering terribly. Her mother is desperate. The mother hears Jesus is passing nearby, and she goes to Him. She cries out for help. It's the cry of a mother who will do anything to save her child. But Jesus doesn't even answer her. His disciples treat her badly: "Send her away" (v 23). The mother is making so much noise it's embarrassing, and she's getting on the disciples' nerves. When Jesus does say something, He tells her He will only help the people of Israel, not some foreigner like her.

Silence, rejection, exclusion, still the woman doesn't give up. Now she kneels before Jesus and begs. It's a heartbreaking scene. Jesus will definitely do something now, right? But no, He tells the woman it's not right to help her instead of the people of Israel. He even calls her a dog. But the woman presses on, asking for the crumbs that come from the table of a dog's master. **Now** Jesus does what we expect Him to do. He heals the child and commends the woman for her faith.

Who are you in this incident? I doubt many of us would say we're the disciples. They just want to get rid of her. I don't resonate with Jesus here, either. He seems to be out of character. He seems uncaring, prejudiced, even mean. The demon-possessed daughter? No, I don't know her well enough. But the woman, the mother, the parent—yes, that's who'd I see myself as in this situation. I'm sure the same is true for most of you.

But wait, are you sure you want to see yourself in that way? I mean, what the woman does seems so foreign to us as Americans, so different from the way we live as proud and independent people. Look closely.

She comes to Jesus begging for help. She has to cry out, yell at Jesus, just to get His attention. Over and over, she's calling to Him for mercy. That's not us. If we don't get served right away, we take our business elsewhere. We have no

patience for someone who won't answer us. We'll walk away and look somewhere else for answers. And we certainly wouldn't embarrass ourselves in front of others by asking for help.

What's more, even after Jesus gives her the silent treatment, even after Jesus says He shouldn't help her because He's been sent to the people of Israel, she still comes and kneels before Him. She doesn't argue with Jesus. That's not us. We like to think of ourselves as special people. We see ourselves as insiders, who deserve the best. That's the sentiment on this drink coaster I once got for a Christmas present from my sister. It says: "Jesus loves you, but I'm his favorite." It may be a joke, but deep down that's more or less our attitude.

It gets worse. The woman is called a dog. Back then, a dog was not seen as favorable as today. Dogs could be house pets, but they were seen as inferior, lowly creatures, and even treated with some contempt. The woman accepts that position. She sees herself as a lowly, miserable creature, unworthy to be asking Jesus anything. That's not us. We have our self-esteem. We are proud to be Americans. No way would we see ourselves as dogs. No way would we see ourselves as people who don't deserve to be treated with respect and dignity. Don't call us dogs. No way!

And one more thing. The woman is content with crumbs. She'd be happy if Jesus just gave her a scrap. It didn't have to be much or the best, just this one favor. Just help my daughter. That's all she was looking for. That's not us. We'd never settle for crumbs. No, we want everything super-sized. We're not happy with just food; we want a supermarket, a super-center to buy whatever groceries we desire. Not just a place to live, but a dream home, made over to be the envy of the neighbors. Not just a car, but a new full-size pick-up or a Cadillac. I've read about how some big churches have actually installed cup holders in the seats so that those who come to church have a place to put their coffee. No, we wouldn't be satisfied with crumbs, table scraps in life.

Who are you? Do you still see yourself as the woman in this scene? It's not quite as easy to do that anymore, is it? I find it hard to be that humble, so needy, so unworthy, so contemptible. Do you see yourself as a dog who has to beg for table scraps?

We should! Why? Because look what happened when the woman accepted the reality that she was not worthy of anything Jesus would do for her. She knew her only hope was to beg for mercy from Jesus, humbly, and as no more than a dog looking for table scraps. And Jesus commends her. He's pleased with her humble faith. He praises her for holding onto Him even when it seemed hopeless.

Who are you? Oh, we **need** to be the woman who holds on to Jesus in humble faith. Why? Because did you notice who the enemy was in this story? It was Satan. It was a demonic possession: “Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is suffering terribly from demon-possession” (v 22). No way the woman could do battle with that enemy. Neither can we.

Only Jesus can defeat Satan. And that’s exactly the super-sized help Jesus wants to give us in our lives. No mere crumbs, but a super-sized victory over the demonic realm.

On a stretch of highway outside of Groom, Texas stands a giant cross that can be seen for miles. It towers over the road to a height of 190 feet! It’s been placed there to witness silently to all drivers what Jesus did for His disciples, for the Canaanite woman, for the lost sheep of Israel, for everyone, even those of us who are unworthy of even a table scrap from Jesus.

Only the cross for Jesus was smaller, wooden, and at a place where He was treated with utter contempt. In that battle with Satan, it appears Jesus was the loser. He dies. He’s buried.

But Jesus won’t go down in defeat to satanic forces. No, He will rise again on Easter Sunday. When Jesus gets rid of the demon in the woman’s daughter, it was just a preview of our Lord getting rid of this enemy’s power over our lives. When He rose from the dead, Jesus defeated all those forces of evil, and He super-sized all sorts of blessings for us.

Forget about crumbs, leftovers, and table scraps. Instead, these blessings come from Jesus’ table: Forgiveness—huge! Heaven—enormous! Salvation—incredible! And all are super-sized for us.

The woman called Jesus “Lord” and humbly knelt before Him. She knew who she was, and she knew what He could do for her. She asked for a table scrap as a dog, but she receives a place at the table with super-sized blessings for her and her daughter.

For us too. It’s just the right posture to kneel before Jesus when we come to the Communion rail to eat at His Table. We humbly ask for His blessings, even though we do not deserve to be in His home. Yet the wafer is placed into our mouths. A sip of wine touches the tongue. Jesus’ very body and blood are present, and those are not leftover scraps. “Take and eat. This is my body, given for you. Take and drink. This is my blood, shed for you for the forgiveness of all your sin unto life everlasting.” Super-sized blessings indeed!

Who are you? The Canaanite woman? A dog? You are a child of God, welcomed into His house to eat at His Table. You are super-sized blessed. All

because Jesus gives super-sized help to those who humbly come to Him as the Canaanite woman did.