

Crumbs from the Table

[Mark 7:24-37](#)

When you study the gospel of Mark, you will notice the author often puts stories together that may seem unrelated.

Since the gospel lesson is our focus for today, I can tell you that for the longest time I was uncomfortable with the first part of this passage – the one concerning the Syrophenician woman.

Call me crazy, but did Jesus actually call this woman a dog? My back is up, how about yours? I've entitled this sermon, 'Crumbs from the Table', but perhaps it should be called, 'Unshakeable Faith'. How many of you would have taken on the son of God in the face of a perceived insult?

Needless to say, I want to pick this story apart. First, Jesus enters the region of Tyre which was predominantly a Gentile region. He is staying in some house (we are not given any details about this), but clearly Jesus' fame was growing because

the scripture tells us Jesus tried to keep his whereabouts a secret. Obviously those in need of healing and cleansing from evil spirits were brought to Jesus at every given opportunity. We know even Jesus needed time to step away from the crowds to rest and to pray and to meditate and to provide in-depth instructions to his inner circle of disciples. Throughout Mark's gospel, Jesus would provide healing and give strict instructions not to tell anyone how he/she was healed. Yet of course word spread anyway. Often those healed were beggars normally found in busy sections of town and recognized by many. When these people were crippled one day and walking the next, word would quickly escape as to the source of the miracle. And so others came seeking a means to re-enter society and alleviate their pain and suffering.

So Jesus was trying to maintain a quiet entrance into this area of Tyre, but he is soon discovered by an unlikely candidate. The woman who approaches Jesus has several things going against her. First, she is a woman. Second, it appears she is traveling alone – a very dangerous thing for a woman to do. She may in fact be a widow as she does not have a man with her and there isn't a man around who approaches Jesus for her on behalf of her daughter. Understand that in Jesus' day, the man's realm was outside the home. Finally, she is a Gentile – she is on the opposite side of a clearly drawn line between those considered clean and those who were unclean. But this woman approaches Jesus and she humbles herself to him in spite of this distinct barrier between herself, a Gentile, and Jesus, the King of the Jews. And if that isn't enough strikes against her, she is called a dog by the son of God.

There are several theories concerning Jesus' response. The woman begs Jesus to drive out a demon that is possessing her daughter. Jesus responds, "Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs."

What a slap in the face! But one thing we know of this woman is her unbridled determination – her daughter was in trouble and Jesus could help her if he chose to. This woman is determined to make sure Jesus chooses to help her daughter. She didn't miss a beat. She says, "Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." What was she saying to Jesus? Perhaps Jesus was focused on the Jewish nation, but this woman was reminding Jesus that God's grace was for everyone – even a Gentile.

I can almost see Jesus doing a double-take at this point. It seems to me he is a bit surprised by her response. Maybe he

thought the woman would accept his criticism and leave only to return home to her troubled daughter. Is it possible this woman's unshakeable faith made Jesus rethink his purpose while on earth? Up until this point, as far as we can tell, the healings and exorcisms were only conducted on those who were most likely Jews. He called 12 Jews as his disciples – even Matthew was a Jew in spite of his profession as tax collector. Perhaps up to this point, Jesus was focused on the called-out ones of Israel.

Could one woman's faith have possibly made a difference in the rest of Jesus' ministry? I would argue it is possible. The story goes on to say that Jesus recognizes and rewards this woman's uncompromising faith and provides healing for her daughter. But it did not stop there. The next story that the author of this gospel presents is a healing of a deaf and dumb

man. Once again we need to note the region Jesus was traveling – he went by way of Sidon toward the Sea of Galilee in the region of the Decapolis. This was also known as Gentile territory. Jesus had expanded his reach to beyond the region of Judea. I wonder about the ones who brought the man forward. Is it possible they heard about the healing of the Syrophenician woman's daughter and found hope that Jesus would extend his healing hand to Gentiles? Barriers continued to be broken down in the presence of Jesus. Lives continued to be changed. Perhaps the inspiration for this area of barrier-breaking began with the uncompromising, unshakeable faith of a lonely woman.

At times any one of us can feel like an outcast in society. Perhaps we don't fit in for whatever reason. Status lines are drawn based on wealth and position and family background. Maybe we don't fit in to the mainstream for any number of

reasons. But in spite of those barriers, how is our faith? Can we stand up to those barriers and claim victory in Jesus without a doubt?

We are all part of the family of God and of this community of believers. We no longer have to fear what tomorrow will bring because ‘our hope is built on nothing less than Jesus’ blood and righteousness’. As we come forward for communion, let us pause to claim God’s love for ourselves. God is offering grace to us freely and without cost. Are we ready to step forward and claim that grace for ourselves? Once we say ‘yes’ to God, there are no mountains we cannot climb. There are no roads we cannot travel, because we know God is with us every step of the way in this life. And we also know that eternal life is ours – Jesus paid the price for our salvation through his body, broken

for you and his blood, shed on the cross for you. Thanks be to
God for the gift of God's son, Jesus Christ. Amen.