

“Enough Crumbs to Go Around”

Mark 7: 24-37

I need to tell you that I come to this pulpit today with fear and trembling. I don't know if you are like me but after this week, I need to know, I need to feel God's presence. I need to know somewhere in this crazy world, God is there, constantly working to bring healing and wholeness to God's creation.

I usually can find this solace, this comfort in the Scriptures and in turn share it with all of you. I can usually find God's word of peace in the Scriptures, especially in the texts that remind me that Jesus came to show us a different way, a way of peace, a way of grace, and most importantly a way of love. Usually I can find solace after a crazy week, by spending time with the text, especially texts that tell us of the many ways the Kingdom of God surprises us with its presence in our midst. I can usually find solace in the texts and in turn, share that solace with all of you.

But I have to tell you, that as much as I needed this solace, this renewed spirit, I did not find what I was looking for in this particular text from Mark. What I got instead was a wake up call. What I got instead when looking at this text was not comfort but rather discomfort and aggravation. Because as I looked at this text,

I was reminded that once again, the Kingdom of God doesn't play by my rules.

The Kingdom of God doesn't hold to my expectations. In looking at this text, I was reminded that being a person of faith is not easy. Instead, rather it is probably one of the most difficult tasks we have laid out before us in this world. And I'm here to tell you, that's not what I needed to hear this past week.

Let me explain: We've all gotten used to when reading the Gospel stories, we've all gotten used to Jesus not doing what we expect him to do. Time and time again, Jesus does the complete opposite of what we expect. For example: a prostitute busts into a dinner party where Jesus just happens to be. She pours expensive oil over Jesus' feet and dries them with her hair. Now we all expect Jesus to send her away, rebuked and shunned. But instead, Jesus welcomes her. Jesus embraces her. Instead, Jesus dries her tears and says, "My Child, you are forgiven."

Or how about this? A tax collector invites Jesus to dinner. Now we all expect Jesus to refuse the invitation because after all, this guy was a tax collector, one of the most despised people ever. He worked for the Roman Empire. He took money, sometimes too much money from his very own people. Surely, Jesus would turn down this invitation to break bread with this guy especially since everyone else was declining the invitation. It was the expected thing, the right thing to do. After all, everyone knows you don't break bread with a tax collector.

But no, what does Jesus do? He calls out to this man and says, “I would love to come to your house today for dinner. What are we having?” Wait. What?!

Instead of turning down this invitation, Jesus graciously accepts it and breaks bread with this tax collector.

I’m not telling us anything we don’t already know. We have gotten used to Jesus not doing what we expect. In reading the Gospel stories, we have gotten used to Jesus not playing by our rules. Nothing Jesus says or does surprises us anymore...well that is until this story.

In this story, once again we find Jesus not acting like we expect him to but not in a good way. Honestly, within reading the first couple of lines of this story, I knew what I expected to happen. I expected Jesus, like all the other times before, I expected Jesus to welcome this woman. I expected Jesus to be empathic, to be compassionate towards this woman. I expected Jesus to say “I’ve healed your daughter.” Like all those other times before, I expected Jesus to welcome the outsider. I expected Jesus to welcome this woman, embrace this woman. I expected Jesus to see her as made in the image of God just like all the other times before when Jesus encountered someone who was hurting, someone who was broken, someone who just needed to know they were seen as a child of God. Like all the

other times before, I expected Jesus to do something grace-filled and life-giving for this woman.

But no. Once again, we find Jesus not acting like we expect him to but this time, not in a good way. In this story, Jesus is grump. In this story, Jesus is ornery. In this story, Jesus is down right mean. He is not acting like the Jesus that I have come to expect, the Jesus that I hope for. He certainly isn't being the Jesus that I need him, that we need him, that the world needs him to be right now. This Jesus is grump. This Jesus is ornery. This Jesus is down right mean.

I come to the Gospels stories and I expect Jesus to act a certain way. But not today. On this day, when I need Jesus the most, on this day when I need Jesus to be full of grace, full of welcome, I don't find it. Instead I find a very human, a very grumpy, a very tired man. I find a very empty Jesus. In this story, once again, I am reminded that the Kingdom of God doesn't always fulfill my expectations, but not in a good way.

I will tell you as I read this story, I struggled. I struggled with this Jesus. I struggled with his reaction. I struggled with my reaction. As I read this story, I struggled as a person of faith.

I know we all have our off days. I fully admit that there have been days as I have served as your minister that I just prayed to avoid pastoral calls, you know

times when I have to be nice, whether I want to or not, be nice to someone just because my name was on the sign as pastor. I fully admit that there have been times when I have prayed to avoid pastoral calls simply because I was not in the mood. I was grumpy. I was tired. And I knew that if anyone asked something of me, my reaction would not have been pretty. But you see, I'm allowed those types of days. I'm human. I'm not the Son of God nor have I ever claimed to be.

It is okay for me, for us to have off days as people of faith but not Jesus. He is supposed to be perfect. He is supposed to be grace filled all the time. He is supposed to be welcoming and loving all the time. He is supposed to be the Son of God all the time.

So what do we do when he is not? Mark clearly tells us that Jesus is having an off day. Mark clearly tells us that Jesus tried to sneak away. Mark clearly tells us that Jesus just needed some time to renew his spirits which he doesn't get thanks to this woman.

So what do we do when Jesus doesn't act like we expect him to but not in a good way?

Well, in the past, commentators have tried to make excuses for Jesus' behavior. They have tried to say yes, Jesus was just having an off day. Everyone is

allowed that because after all, Jesus was human too, something we all tend to forget.

Okay, I'll buy that to a point but that doesn't completely explain away Jesus' rude behavior. Now when I say rude behavior, I'm not saying Jesus just snapped at this woman out of frustration. When I say rude behavior, I'm talking about the fact that Jesus basically calls this woman a dog. And not some cute cuddly puppy we would all like to take home and cuddle. No. That's not the case.

Jesus calls this woman a word that can easily be translated into a word that in modern times we would say rhymes with witch. Jesus' behavior towards this woman is derogatory. Jesus' behavior towards this woman is dehumanizing. Jesus' behavior towards this woman is downright hateful.

As I said, because of this awful fact, commentators in the past have tried to show Jesus a little grace in this situation. After all, he is Jesus. So they said that Jesus was just trying to test this woman's faith. Jesus was just trying to see how strong her faith really was before he would respond to her request.

Umm no. I'm not buying that. And here's why: Jesus did lots of healings in the Gospel of Mark before this point and Jesus does lots of healings after this point. And nowhere, in all those healings before and after this story, does Jesus act like he does towards this woman. Not once does Jesus call people hateful,

derogatory names before he does the healing to test their faith except in this one instance.

So what's different about this situation?

The answer to that question is location, location, location! For this particular healing, Jesus is in new territory. He is in Gentile territory. He is among all those people who were considered outside of God's family, considered outside of God's grace. Jesus is among all those people who were considered outside of God's love. Jesus is in Gentile territory. And not just on the edges like in some of the healing stories before this point. No, Jesus is deep, deep deep within Gentile territory and suddenly he is asked to heal someone, to interact with someone who has been told she doesn't belong.

Or at least, that's what Jesus may have been taught all his life. Maybe, somewhere, by someone, socially or culturally, Jesus had been taught a prejudice, a prejudice that reinforced the idea that there were the right people and there were the wrong people. Maybe socially and culturally Jesus had been taught that only God's grace, only God's love was for the people of Israel and there just wasn't enough to go around.

Maybe just maybe Jesus had been taught socially and culturally a prejudice, a prejudice that set up who is in and who is out. And now, Jesus was being

confronted with that prejudice-in flesh and blood, a real person, standing before him, asking for help.

Like I said, what do you do with a down right hateful Jesus who once again doesn't act like we expect him to?

We take a step back. We take a step back and remember this isn't the first time the Kingdom of God doesn't fulfill our expectations. Think about it. In all the Gospel stories, we are told time and time again, shown time and time again, how the Kingdom of God breaks in and surprises us. In all the Gospel stories, we are told time and time again, that there is more than enough love, more than enough grace, more than enough healing and wholeness to go around. Time and time again, in all the Gospel stories, we are shown that there is more than enough crumbs of bread falling from God's table of welcome that none will ever go hungry, that none will ever be turned away. Time and time again, in all the Gospel stories, the presence of the Kingdom of God does not act like we expect it to. It constantly surprises us. It constantly challenges us. It constantly confronts us with our divisions and bias and forces us to tear them down.

Just like the woman does for Jesus in this story.

You see, the woman reminds Jesus that as the people of God, we are called to model an active reality of the Gospel. We are called to model a way of being

that frees God's word of welcome from social and cultural boundaries and biases. As the people of God, we are called to live our lives out of the understanding that there is more than enough crumbs falling from God's table of welcome to go around.

As people of God, we are called to be open to the many ways God continues to break into lives, the many ways God challenges us, the many ways God confronts us. Time and time again, God reminds us that the Kingdom of God doesn't always look like we expect it to, doesn't always behave like we want it to. Instead, We are called to be open to the many ways God confronts us and challenges us to become the people God created us and calls us to be.

The thing we as readers need to realize is unlike what we expect to happen, the transformative, the life-giving word doesn't come from Jesus. It comes from an outsider. It comes from the woman who loved her daughter so much that she would risk it all. She would face the insults. She would take on the ugliness of discrimination if it meant her daughter would have a chance at new life.

Sound familiar?

That's the power of the Kingdom of God. That's the grace of the Kingdom of God. That's the way the Kingdom of God works.

It calls us to be open...to open our ears, open our eyes, open our hearts, and realize that God is doing the unexpected. God is bringing healing and wholeness to all of God's creation in ways that we could never have imagined.

And all we have to do to experience this power, to experience this grace, to experience this love is to be open, be open to seeing it in our midst, to be open to experiencing it in our lives. All we have to do is be open to sharing this love, this grace, this healing and wholeness. All we have to do is be open to sharing it with all of God's creation, sharing it with all of God's children, even the ones who don't think like us, don't act like us, even the ones who confront us and challenge us. We are called to be open to the many ways the Kingdom of God works and acts in our lives, especially the ways we don't expect it to.

You see, the power of this story is that Jesus doesn't stay grumpy. Jesus doesn't stay confined in his prejudice. Instead, he listens to this woman. He hears her story. He feels her pain. He sees the love she has for her daughter and he changes his mind. He opens his heart.

Jesus changes his mind. He opens his heart and he helps the daughter. And in doing so, he stretches himself into a more loving person. In doing so, Jesus becomes the person we all expect him to be, but more importantly, he becomes the person we all need him to be, a person of love, a person of peace, a person of

grace. Jesus becomes the person who will constantly confront us and challenge us to become the same way as well.

I will tell you that as the week unfolded I had planned to talk about the Rowan county clerk situation because it seemed to fit so perfectly with this story. I planned on saying that both sides of the issue could learn a thing or two from the Syro- Phoenician woman.

But I'm not going to do that. I'm not going to do that because this week, I was confronted with a photograph, a photograph of a young refugee boy who had drowned. In this photograph, this young boy's body had washed up on the shore. His body became a tangible and visible sign of what happens when someone is told they don't belong. His body became A tangible and visible sign of what happens when someone is told that there is not enough. His body, became A tangible and visible sign of what happens when biases and divisions speak louder than love and grace.

This photograph breaks my heart and haunts my dreams. No longer can I say this crisis doesn't matter to me. The Kingdom of God has broken into my world, into all of our worlds. The Kingdom of God in the form of this photograph is challenging us and confronting us with this world's hate filled prejudices and dehumanizing situations. No longer can we say this crisis doesn't involve me.

The Kingdom of God has broken into our lives. It is demanding that we act in ways that this world doesn't not expect. We can no longer ignore this crisis like the darkness wants us to or expects us to. No we must act in unexpected ways. We must act in ways of grace, in ways of love, in ways that proclaim to this world that there is more than enough.

We must become the visible and tangible signs of the Kingdom of God at work in this world. We must become the visible and tangible signs that shout to the world that there is more than enough to go around. We must become the visible and tangible signs of what can happen when love and grace are shared with all of God's children.

May it be so. Amen.