

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

We pick up our gospel reading with Jesus in the region of Tyre, where a Gentile, a Syrophenician woman begs him to cast the demon out of her daughter. Now a number of folks have looked askance at this line from our gospel: "Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." People jump to conclusions such as "he called her a dog", or "Jesus would not have said such a thing", or "what kind of example is this? I thought he said to love your neighbor as yourself!" For the same reasons some pastors will skip over this when preaching from this gospel. Of course jumping to conclusions often leads to tired legs and not much else. Yes, it is fact that the Jewish people had no time for Gentiles, including the Romans whom they dealt with out of necessity. At that time the Jewish people, and the Jewish people alone were the chosen people, those chosen of God. Gentiles, Samaritans and everyone else were regarded as less than the Jewish people, Gentiles and the rest weren't the chosen ones.

Notice now, Jesus never uses the word "you", he doesn't say "you are a dog," nor does he say "your daughter is a dog" or any such. The words he speaks to her were commonplace among Jews of the day. Jesus doesn't say she doesn't have a claim on God's mercies. He doesn't deny her request. But he has been sent by God with a mission that is first and foremost to the Jewish people, the "children" of Israel, not to the exclusion of Gentiles, dogs or not, after all, even dogs are part of the household. Jesus comes first to "the tribes of Jacob," then he is "a light to the nations."

Now think for a moment if you had been one of the twelve standing there. You would hear words you're accustomed to thinking, even saying, yourself. Lessons of clean and unclean, right from the religious teachers of the day and what Jesus is saying isn't a surprise to you, you nod your head in agreement. But then the woman says "Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." She said what?! Not at all what you would have expected to hear. She calls him "sir," actually the word is better translated as "Lord". She recognizes power, she recognizes who and what Jesus is. She knows he is compassionate and she trusts that compassion even in the face of what seems to us to be a seeming rebuke, a putdown.

You're standing there, she's unclean, unworthy, a dog in your eyes, yet you witness the confession that Jesus is Lord and even the crumbs that fall on the floor are more than sufficient! In Nazareth, Jesus' hometown, they didn't believe and he could do few acts of power. The religious authorities of the day don't believe and constantly attack Jesus in spite of the miracles and signs that point to who he is. Yet this woman recognizes Jesus as Lord! Her prayer is granted and Jesus casts out the demon from a distance, and she in faith simply takes him at his word and goes home to find her daughter lying on the bed, the demon gone.

Perhaps there is a lesson here for us. We judge others, including Jesus, by our own standards of clean and unclean. We ask for things, sometimes like we're hoping for a genie to give us what we desire. The Syrophenician woman comes to Jesus with

nothing except a prayer for the healing of her daughter, she has nothing to give, no bargain to make, she can't do anything on her own, she has no business even being there. She'll take a crumb and gladly, faithfully go on her way trusting Jesus' word.

You and I will soon come to the table, nothing to give, no bargains to make, we are Gentiles, pagans, dogs if you will, unclean, unlovable, but made clean by our God who loves us anyway. And we find that there is a place at the table for us. Brothers and sisters, there is room for us, Jesus wants you to understand who you are and whose you are. You are a believer from the grace of God, and you are his, your place is at the table, your place is with Jesus, following him, learning from him, loving him and imitating him.

AMEN