

Matthew 15:21-28

9/3/17

Vicar Caleb Weight, Hope Lutheran Church

*Dogs at the Table*

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our father and our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.

How many people in here are dog people? How many are cat people? How many people in here do not like animals? I myself am a dog person. My whole life I have loved dogs. I remember my family had two dogs growing up. They would bark when someone knocked on the door. striking fear into every person who came up to the house. And as the person would hesitantly open the door, they would find on the other side, two ferocious Chihuahua's ready to maul them... Their names were Chalupa and Rita and they were great little dogs. They were loyal, and they were treated like another part of the family...

During dinner, you would hear the clicking of their tiny paws on the hard wood floor, coming to stand or sit under the table. As kids, we were always told to never give the dog food from the table because then they would forever come back and beg for it. Well, we saw these cute little Chihuahuas, and we saw on our plates the food that was keeping us from being excused, and we saw an opportunity.... So what would we do? We would slowly, and sneakily give them the excess food on our plates.

In our Gospel reading for the day, we heard Jesus refer to a woman as a dog... but not as a dog who is a member of the family, but someone who was an outcast. Jesus was traveling in a place called Tyre and Sidon, this is outside of Israel, so there are not any Jewish people but

instead, Gentiles, people who do not believe and worship God. So it shouldn't be of any surprise when a Gentile woman comes up to him... until she says, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me..." This is an interesting development because this woman is a Gentile, and has somehow heard of this man called Jesus. But, she also recognizes him as Lord...

We don't know how this Gentile woman came to hear about Jesus... We can imagine that word has spread about him and the healings, and miracles that he has done. But she addresses him as a disciple would, as Lord. And she tells him that her daughter has become possessed with a demon and needs help. But Jesus didn't answer her. And his disciples were kind of, urging him to just cast out the demon so that she would leave them alone. To do a miracle out of convenience. But instead Jesus makes a profound assertion, he says "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel..." Jesus is establishing a truth, that he was sent as the Messiah to the Israelites, to the Jewish people. And not to her... a Gentile.

But the Canaanite woman persists... And Jesus continues with what appears to be a rather stunning remark... "It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs..." But this use of dogs is not the same use as I talked about earlier, he is not referring to her as a member of the family, but instead he uses an insult, he uses a term which is a slang use for someone who is a gentile someone considered unclean. This person that is unclean is not someone who will have a spot at the table... But instead, she belongs on the floor with the dogs...

This Canaanite woman responds with an astounding statement of faith... "Even the dogs eat the crumbs from the masters table." This Canaanite woman knows her place... unclean

before Christ, she knows that she does not belong at the table, yet she knows of the abundance of His grace... That his table overflows even to the dogs. And because of her great faith, Christ said to her your request has been granted, and her daughter was healed from that hour.

Jesus in this moment did not see a gentile woman who was no better than a dog... Jesus did not see the cultural division that was so prevalent to his disciples. He did not see her as unclean, but instead he saw a woman in need, a woman who needed him. She was a woman who needed Jesus.

You might be wondering what in the world was this woman doing? This woman has no business seeking the help of Jesus. She is not one of God's chosen people. She is like Chalupa, or Rita coming to the table when it is dinner time. Just looking for scraps, she is a dog... begging. But she knows who this man is... She has heard the stories. So she responds, and even though she is a gentile, she puts her faith in Christ. Even though she is not one of the children of Israel who are sitting at the table, Christ grants her request and casts the demon from her daughter. Because of her faith, Christ grants her a seat at the table, because Christ is for all people.

Do you see what is going on here? This woman took all notion of division, and threw it out the window. But what about you and me? In the world today, we often struggle with division. I was scrolling through the news one day a few weeks ago, and there was a little picture with words written on it, and it said "I don't know if I should be preparing for Civil War II, or World War III..." We do not need to look far today to see someone who is different than us. Someone who believes different than us. Someone who thinks different than us. We all have a vision of the church and what it looks like, who belongs and who doesn't. We all have an

opinion about who the dogs are in the world and in society. The dogs who are not allowed to sit at our table.

We all do it. I am guilty of this, I catch myself in it all the time. Everyone has their own “dogs.” Those people that we see unclean to sit with us. The people that we do not want to associate with. People who we disagree with. As Christians we are often selfish. As people, broken by sin, we want to keep Christ to ourselves. We do not want to share our table... At least, not with the dogs.

We all have those people we consider dogs, but we are actually are dogs too... We, like this Canaanite woman, do not belong at the table either. Like it or not, we are not the Israelites, we are not the people that this Messiah was sent to, we are unclean, we are sinners unworthy of God’s grace. But Jesus does not decide who sits at the table by how they look, where they are born, who they voted for, how much money they have, or by their past sins. But instead by those who have faith in him. And by this faith, Christ forgives you of all your sins.

Jesus saw a woman in need. So as Jesus saw the Canaanite woman, we shall also see our neighbor. We look at them through the eyes of Jesus. We see someone who needs him, and his grace. The moment the Canaanite woman put her faith in Jesus she was no longer a dog eating the crumbs... but she was a member of God’s family at the table getting the bread. She was not a dog coming in at the sound of dinner waiting for someone to give them the scraps. We are not any different, we have a spot at the table because of our faith in Jesus. And this spot at the table is for all people. No matter what divides us, this faith in Jesus is what brings us together.

So what does this mean for us? Sure faith brings us together, but there is still this division in the world... We strive to look at people not for who they are as sinners, but through the eyes of Christ, and see some who needs Jesus. Instead of seeing someone who cut you off in traffic, you see someone who needs Jesus... Instead of seeing your next door neighbor who annoys you, you see someone who needs Jesus. Instead of seeing your coworker as someone who you can't stand working with, you see someone who needs Jesus.

In this world of division, pain, and sin... We try to see through the eyes of Jesus. It is not always easy. Someone wrongs us, and we sin. Someone offends us and we sin. And believe it or not we offend others, we cause division too, we are sinners. But, as Christians, as those who put our faith in Christ, Jesus has looked at us and has seen us as people who need him. We are no different than those who we see as dogs.

As we leave here today, and we look at the world and at all of the division, let's strive to instead see people who Christ came and died for, see people who do not yet know his love, see people that we want at the table, and show them the love of Christ. Look through the eyes of Jesus. Know that your sins are forgiven, and know that this forgiveness is for everyone. We know that all who have faith will be at the table with Christ.

And may the peace of God which surpasses all understanding keep your hearts and mind on Christ Jesus.

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