

Thought for the Day. Thursday 16th March 2023  
Matthew 15: 1-39: Crumbs from the table

“The woman said, “Yes Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master’s table.” (Verse 27)



We are not dog people! We have never owned a dog and never will. But gradually all around us many of our friends have acquired dogs and clearly love them. And recently even our son and his wife bought a dog who is lovely and a little insane! She is a puppy called Pudding and races around our house at high speed. We have rather fallen for her. One of Pudding’s most helpful characteristics is the way she “hoovers” the floor for dropped crumbs and bits of food. It’s one less job to clean them up because she laps up everything.

We have little time for crumbs in life. They are generally a nuisance. They have little value to us. Yet in Communion services in Church we talk of them as we consider how God regards us as we enter this most intimate of mysteries. We say in one prayer, "We are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under your table. But you are the same Lord whose nature is always to have mercy. Grant us therefore, gracious Lord, so to eat the flesh of your dear Son Jesus Christ and to drink his blood, that we may evermore dwell in him and he in us." Amen.

We have no real right to receive so much and yet God loves us and welcomes us and longs for us to receive eternal life.

This account from the Gospels is not straight forward. Some of the plays of Shakespeare are regarded as problem plays. So too some of the sayings of Jesus are problematic at least at first sight. Jesus had a very specific calling to his own people which is picked up in Matthew 10: 5 and 6. He sends his disciples out on mission with this instruction. "Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of Israel." God's Kingdom was beginning to appear and the mission of Jesus was to bring it to his people first.

But there are often other people around, as he talks

and heals, who notice the life and freedom which he brings and want this for themselves. Their faith in Jesus is often greater than that of their Jewish neighbours. As it is here for this Caananite woman who clearly believes that Jesus can heal her stricken daughter.

The healing follows and Jesus' recognition of the woman's faith yet only after an exchange which seems downright insulting. To call someone a "dog" now would be unacceptable. The Jewish people used the word regularly as a way of dismissing the Gentiles as inferior. And Jesus uses the word here. As she asks him for help he says, "It is not fair to take away the children's food and throw it to the dogs." As ever in the text we don't know how he said it - maybe with irony or to make a point? However it was said, the woman recognises and accepts the slight and turns it around.

"Yes, Lord, even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from the master's table."

Jesus sees how huge her faith is and so healing follows. All can receive not just the crumbs but the very Bread of Heaven.

I finish with another prayer from Terry Hinks from Praying the Way on this passage:-

"Where will your Spirit take us next, God of all that lives? Surely every barrier that divides must be broken,

every human being welcomed to your feast.....The names by which whole races must be demeaned must be forgotten. The labels we place on others must be thrown away.....

We thank you for all that Jesus learned that day from the unnamed women of Caanan, whose desperate prayer and sharpened wit touched him to the core. And we thank you for all that he taught from his deepest being of your overwhelming compassion and glorious grace to feed hungry humanity.”

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