

## A BEGGAR'S FAITH

MATTHEW 15:21-28

And Jesus went away from there and withdrew to the district of Tyre and Sidon. [22] And behold, a Canaanite woman from that region came out and was crying, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon." [23] But he did not answer her a word. And his disciples came and begged him, saying, "Send her away, for she is crying out after us." [24] He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." [25] But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me." [26] And he answered, "It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." [27] She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." [28] Then Jesus answered her, "O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire." And her daughter was healed instantly.

Quincy Jones. The name may not mean much to you, but believe me, if you are in the entertainment business, you know the name. Jones has done it all in the entertainment industry, he was a performer, composer, promoter, producer, director, arranger. Perhaps his greatest achievement, however, is the ability he has to bring big name talent together, blending their talents and getting them to work together on a project. Jones has worked with the biggest names in the entertainment industry: stars such as Diana Ross, Kenney Rogers, Aretha Franklin, Michael Bolton, Gladys Knight, Kenney G., Lionel Ritchie, and many others.

Jones was the music producer of the song: "We are the World," which featured the combined talents of many of the top pop singers of our generation. To get everyone on board, Jones did something very simple, yet profound. At the entry way to the recording studio he hung a sign which simply read: CHECK YOUR EGO AT THE DOOR!

What a lesson, not just for the talented group of artists who performed in that recording studio, but what a lesson for us today. Each of us has been taught to think for ourselves, stand up for ourselves, to believe in ourselves. It is important to do that, so that no one steps all over you and takes advantage of you. I know that I was taught by my sainted mom to ask for what I needed. She would always say: if you need anything just ask. But she would also tell me, "You don't have to beg for it."

Begging is looked down upon in our society. We like to think of ourselves as self made people. We are told from an early age that you have to work to get ahead, that nothing in life is free, and that if you want something you have to earn it and that you can be all that you want to be. All this is fine and good, however it doesn't add up in our relationship with God. We can not earn or merit God's love or forgiveness. God loves us and gives us His gifts freely, without our earning them, or even asking for them. That fact doesn't stop us from trying, however. And this offends God.

We offend God on two counts, first, that we can not in any way, shape or form, earn anything from God. The Bible is clear on this fact. Paul writes to the Ephesians that it is by grace you are saved, not of works. Everything that we have is by grace, our life is a gift, and our salvation is a gift. It isn't because of anything we have done; it is because of what God has done. Hence, if God is the gift giver, and gives all that we possess freely, we offend Him by trying to pay for something that He gives for free. Just as you would be offended if someone offered you money for something you gave out of love, so too God is offended by our thinking that we can get Him to act kindly to us because of who we are or what we have done.

We offend God, though, when we think that we don't need His gifts or His help. When we think that we are self sufficient, and that we don't need God, we offend God. We think that we shouldn't have to go to God and ask for something, why, indeed, should we bother God?

We can make it on our own, we can get out of our own mess, we have the ability, the where with all to make amends. We don't need help, because we wrongly think, we AREN'T HELPLESS. And above all else, we shouldn't have to come on hands and knees begging to God. We are too good for that, or so the prevailing wisdom goes.

But if you note carefully what happens in our text for today, this is precisely the attitude and the posture God wants us to have. JESUS WANTS US TO COME TO GOD ON OUR HANDS AND NEEDS, BEGGING FOR MERCY AT GOD'S THRONE OF GRACE. For in reality, that is who we are, we are beggars, who deserve no good thing from God.

Jesus calls us to leave behind our arrogance, haughtiness, vanity, conceit, and selfish pride. He calls us to repent, to turn from our sinful selves and to trust in God, to come as beggars to God's throne of mercy to find help in time of need.

In our text for today, Jesus is in the region of Tyre and Sidon. It seems to me that Jesus went there to actually look for this situation to happen. Matthew tells us that a Canaanite woman, a heathen woman, one who would be considered unclean and unapproachable by a Jew ran to Jesus crying for mercy. This woman was a mom who was at the end of her rope. Her daughter was afflicted by a demon. Years of doctoring by the best of physicians could not give her or her daughter aid or comfort. This woman and her daughter were in a hopeless situation. There was no where to turn but to Jesus, and this is what she did. This mother wasn't interested in what others thought about her, she knew that she was unclean and was not to be in the vicinity of Jesus, but that didn't matter. She and her daughter were helpless and they saw help in Jesus. And so her fervently cry: "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon."

Jesus' response was interesting, He didn't answer her a word. Not a word! He certainly heard her cry, but Jesus chose to ignore her. Even though this woman believed in Jesus, she

called Him the Son of David, after all, and even though she cried out in desperation, Jesus kept walking.

Why would God do this? Why not just answer the woman and be done with it? Luther explains here how God works, in that Jesus is seeking to drive her faith deep into her heart so that her faith becomes strong and firm. That is why He is silent as stone; God conceals His help so that she would be utterly helpless and cling to Jesus alone. And so Jesus keeps walking. The woman's persistence obviously bothered the disciples; they asked Jesus to do away with her, to send her away, to not be a bother to the Lord or to them anymore. She was actually becoming an annoyance, so the disciples asked Jesus to send her away so that they, and Jesus, would not have to be bothered anymore.

However, this woman was a bother; she made herself known to Jesus by her persistence. She kept following, so much so that the disciples told Jesus that she was "crying out after us." Yelling, shouting, crying out, this woman was pulling out all of the stops to make herself known.

Jesus answered the disciples by saying that He was only sent to the lost sheep of Israel. Did that mean that Jesus couldn't or wouldn't do a miracle? By no means, He had healed the Samaritan woman, granted the centurion's request, as evidence that He loved all people. Jesus had told the disciples before that they were to: "Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans, [6] but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." (Matthew 10:5-6). Jesus was simply telling His disciples, and the nation of Israel, that He came to fulfill all of what was written about Him in the prophets and the Scriptures. Jesus proclaimed the Kingdom of God in the midst of God's chosen people, Israel, to show them what God was doing for them and among them. Once Jesus had proclaimed this to the Jews, then the messages would go throughout the entire world. Jesus, here, was simply stating a matter of fact.

This Gentile woman, though, did not give up. She would not be detained. Her daughter's misery was her own, and she fell at Jesus' feet, begging for mercy, saying; "Please have mercy." Jesus' reply is stunning, ""It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." It seems as if this is a harsh thing for God to say, to say no to a request, but Jesus here is giving us a common everyday example, that we, and the woman can relate to.

If you have a dog at home, sometimes you will find yourself feeding your pet scraps from the table. Why? Because they are begging and you love them. Once they beg, with their sad eyes looking at you, your heart melts, and you give in. This is what the woman is talking about, that even our pets get table scraps, so she, in her request, asks Jesus to just give a table scrap of mercy and she would be satisfied.

What faith this woman has, and Jesus recognizes it, saying: "O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire." And her daughter was healed instantly.

What a lesson for us, in prayer, and in faith. She came to Jesus begging for mercy. She realized that she could offer nothing to God, so she came on hands and knees, pleading for mercy and grace, for help in time of need.

This is the sum and substance of the Christian life. You see, none of us are self sufficient. None of us can get by on our own efforts, merits, ingenuity, or strength. We need Jesus. We need God's help. And so God gives us help, in the Person of Himself. He makes us His children in Baptism. He feeds us in His Word and Sacrament; He empowers us to be His people. He calls each of us to follow Jesus. Not relying on anything we can do, but to solely trust in God. To be and live as a beggar, each and every day of our lives. Begging God for forgiveness, mercy, strength, and help in time of need, begging, for we have nothing and God has everything we need. We are unworthy sinners, but we have been touched by God's grace in Christ. That, my friend, is what faith is all about. Trusting in Christ for forgiveness, life,

salvation, everything. Luther summed up the Christian life in this way: We are beggars, all. And that is who we are. That is how we are called to live, trusting in Christ and asking Him for His help and strength.

There is a story about a family of ducklings that fell down a sewer grate in Vancouver. Their mother did what any parent would do. She got help from a passing police officer. The mother duck grabbed the policeman by the pant leg while he was on foot patrol. The policeman shoved what he thought was just a goofy duck away, but she persisted, grabbing his leg again when he tried to leave, and then waddling to a nearby sewer grate where she sat down and waited for him to follow and investigate. The policeman came to where she sat and saw eight little baby ducklings in the water below. Police removed the heavy metal grate with the help of a tow truck and used a vegetable strainer to lift the ducklings to safety. Mother and offspring then departed for a nearby pond.

That mother duck did what the Canaanite woman did. She persisted in seeking help until she got it. And that is just what Jesus wants us to do. Be persistent in getting the help you need. Ask and it will be given to you, seek and you will find. You have a Friend and Savior who is able to help, who is willing to help. Turn to Christ. Ask for His mercy. Live your life trusting in Jesus, having the faith of a beggar. Amen