

Living off Crumbs

Mark 7:24-37; Isaiah 35:1-10

Bold: Autumn Leaves

Although it's still officially summer we can all see that autumn is already beginning to creep into our psyches here in Northwest Wisconsin. The mums are out on people's porches, there is talk of how people love or abhor pumpkin spice anything, and the trees – the trees are showing hues of gold already. After that huge rainfall of last week, I saw numerous gold leaves on the roof of my car.

It was right around this time or a bit later last year when I was in Carson Park, kicking a few leaves in the grass, walking along the sidewalk with the new puppy, now a year old. I remember seeing all these chalk messages on the ground for what was likely a big 5K or marathon that had just happened. The chalk

writings were still there, writings of encouragement and cheering:

“You go girl!” “You are half way there!” “You can do it!” “Run to be strong for others!”

These words of encouragement were not for me as I walked along the trail. They were for others, tailor made comments for those who ran. The encouragement was not for me while I did a gentle walk, but like leftover crumbs, they gave me a little sustenance. I remember smiling about it and my spirits were lifted by the words of others.

Slide: Jesus said what?

Encouraging words were not in the vocabulary of our Lord Jesus when he encountered an unnamed woman while in the region of Tyre, a deeply gentile territory. What that means about it being a deeply Gentile territory was that she was likely a Greek, a person who was not Jewish, a Syrophoenician.

Up until this point, Jesus was called to bring the Good News first to Jews. Jesus was of Jewish origin after all. So, this just may be the only story in the entire Bible where a person puts Jesus in his place and we might even say, rightly so. In fact, Jesus might even make us, dare I say, a little embarrassed.

Before this moment in chapter seven, Jesus had been slowly working himself to acute fatigue. The crowds were pressing in on him to heal them, he miraculously fed 5,000 people, walked on water scaring his disciples half to death; furthermore, he was traveling all over the place, crossed the sea of Galilee more than once, and then told parables and stories to his disciples who clearly didn't understand a word he was saying. Jesus was tired. His human side was showing. And, it is clear in today's reading that he wants to be left alone. He didn't even want his disciples to know where he was.

Slide: Crumb on Floor

Now, I'm not excusing him. He literally called this woman and her poor daughter a dog, which in those days was an ethnic slur. We don't know the tone of his voice, of course. We also don't know hers. And, as the people of God, we even can get caught up in going on the defensive for team Jesus a bit too quickly. All the signs point to a tired Jesus who dismisses a woman in need.

Thank God that's not the end of the story. Here we see a woman who will not be silenced, who in all accounts, shouldn't even be talking to a man, let alone to a Jew. That simply wasn't done in those days. The courage it must have taken for her to do this and even to not back down shows the desperate love she had for her daughter. And, it is she, who takes his slur and turns it around, reminding Jesus who he is:

"Lord, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs."

Slide: Crumbs

Crumbs. That's all she is asking for. Pitiful crumbs, just a bit. And, she asks for it with deference and respect, almost admitting that as a Gentile, she doesn't expect the whole loaf of bread. She just wants the leftovers. And, Jesus is impressed. It is a turning point in Mark's Gospel. This story needed to be told by Mark so that we could see that turning point, the point where God declares that even and especially the outsider, the foreigner and the outcast belong in the reign of God. They also are included in the bountiful meal.

Now I know that generally I consider crumbs off of anything a negative thing. First, crumbs are messy. Crumbs on the floor of whatever food you eat can attract animals. Crumbs cause stains on your clothes and make a place look untidy. We try not to drop crumbs all over the table or on to the floor. I even talk about my dog as being the vacuum for our floor because of dropping crumbs and pieces of food. Why else would we say, "We feel

crummy" when we are under the weather?

Slide: Communion Bread

On my first go as a pastor in Strum, I had the idea of having my first third grade class celebrating their first communion to make the bread for the worship service. That had never been tried before but the children really wanted to do it. So, we baked the bread together. It turned out to be very crumbly, likely because we somehow skipped some ingredient or didn't mix it very well, but hey, it was their bread made for the worship service.

During communion the bread got everywhere. It was in the chalice, got on all the way down my front and it was all over the floor. It tasted great, but still got everywhere. The children were so happy that they made the bread but I was concerned that people might not like all those crumbs everywhere, especially the altar guild that had to clean it up. Truth be told, I was a little embarrassed about the mess. Maybe we wouldn't try that again.

But, I was wrong. The wonderful people who served on the worship ministry were thrilled to see the children involved. To them, instead of seeing crumbs, they saw children bringing Christ to them to share in the meal. They didn't mind one iota to clean that all up. They also didn't feel like arguing about the theology of the host of the Eucharist or anything like that. If anything, it was my theological purity that needed to be challenged and I will never forget the phrase that was spoken:

Slide: Every Crumb

“Every crumb made me think that Jesus was everywhere and even in the messy stuff.”

Slide: Crumbs on Table

Those silly crumbs meant something to those kids and to those who were fed by their desire to bring Jesus to them. It was my heart that needed to change. Isn't it the same today? All we are asking for are crumbs. Give us something, Lord Christ. We don't need the

whole turkey; just a little is all we ask for now.

We are desperate. We are desperate for healing, for wisdom, for meaning and direction. We have sick children, sick mothers and fathers. We have teenagers who want to end their lives. We have war and suffering. We have polarization. Give us just a little, please God. We'll take the crumbs! We'll take anything to make our lives more meaningful and have purpose!

In the Gentile woman who knelt at the feet of Christ, and in that very human moment, Jesus saw that just like the Gentile man he next opened the ears and mouth of, he too, had his ears opened to hear her pleading. Maybe even Jesus needed a momentary crumb in his fatigue - a reminder of who he was - God in human flesh and bone with us.

Likely, we are all here to be fed. There are times in our lives when we find ourselves starving. Today may be one of those days when we come to

Jesus begging for just a little, something...anything. Like the little positive reminders on the sidewalk that were for somebody else, we ask that they be also for us, no matter where we are in life today.

Slide: Holy Communion

And, in this meal that is before us this morning, where all are welcome to the table, that morsel, that little crumb packs a lot of grace. It may not on first looking at it seem like much. But, here at this table, these crumbs are given freely, they are given...for you.