

Bowing Before the Holy One to Feed on the Crumbs of Life
based on Mark 7:24-30, David Jahnke, 6/14/15

I love that we have encountered another challenging text in the gospel of Mark. Time and again, this gospel startles us and shakes up our convictions. It disorients us in order to reorient us around the magnificent and mysterious power of God who is so much greater than our little minds can comprehend. This difference between God and all of us should, in fact, be our starting point when it comes to trying to get a handle on the seeming scandal and offense of this passage; one in which Jesus compares a Gentile woman and her daughter with dogs.

This reminded me of a seminary preaching class in which a classmate preached on the theme of obedience. He gave a lengthy illustration the obedience training courses his dog took and how we all need to kind of get whipped into obedience. I will never forget the shocked look on my feminist professor's face; or her being almost at a loss for words as she tried to explain that she did not appreciate being compared to a dog— or actually placed on a lower level than dogs because they tended to be more obedient.

Now if I had known my Bible better and thought of this passage in Mark, I wonder if I would have had the courage to ask her about it.

Later in seminary, I travelled all around Turkey to the sites where the apostle Paul spread the gospel and started new churches. I remember reading this passage while on the bus and being confounded by it. And I asked a classmate and he could not explain either. Like the woman, I was in the Gentile world north of Israel where Paul had told Gentiles they were welcome to God's table and I essentially heard Jesus say his mission was not primarily to dogs like me but to Jews.

We need to think about who the Gentiles were to a first century Jewish rabbi. They were idolaters, sinners, oppressors. They gave themselves over to their passions with their philosophy of hedonism— gluttony, orgies, drunkenness. Gentiles were part of an empire that had power over the Jewish children of God and used that power to exploit them.

This reflects the dark part of the human condition that we do not particularly care to hear about, sometimes for good reasons, especially among women. Because it has mainly been men projecting their own darkness onto women as they dehumanize them with language like Jesus'. Men have been the ones in power, exploiting those with less power. Men have exalted themselves-- feeling god-like and thus free to give themselves over to their passions.

And while the modern saying that “men are dogs” is particularly true for irreligious and immoral men, I think this applies to everyone. My aunt who was in Disneyland with her teenage son put this quote up on Facebook the other day:

"Even a man who is pure in heart
and says his prayers by night,
may become a wolf, when the wolf bane blooms
and the autumn moon shines bright." - The Wolf Man 1941

The fact of the matter is we are animals. We are not separate and distinct or majestically over and above other creatures. We often act like animals; and the more we learn, the more we realize how much many of them have in common with us—including language and emotions and intelligence. Animals, however, fulfill their role of glorifying their Creator.

We are the ones who place ourselves in the position of God, thinking that we are in control and that can do as we wish whenever we want. So why should Jesus feed us with the bread of life?

Did you notice how the Greek woman did not deny what Jesus called her? She knelt before him and begged him for help. And when Jesus told her that his mission was to feed the Jews, she asked if she and her daughter might not have some crumbs that fall from the table.

This woman is our model. She teaches us to acknowledge: 1. we are creatures who share the same appetites, frailties and temptations as other creatures. 2. Second, we have more in common with these creatures than we do with God whose wisdom and power and purity and love are beyond our conception. 3. Third, our life posture is to bow down before God with gratitude for the crumbs of life that fall from the Great Banquet Table in heaven.

So we need to return to creatureliness, rather than seek to escape it. Think of the awe and wonder of the chimp in the video; think of a squirrel who is content inside the tree with his nuts and a chance to rest. We need to rediscover simplicity... and joy in the beautiful world around us; satisfaction and gratitude for having basic needs met.

How different is this from the modern world's need for hyper-stimulation. Yesterday evening, I went on a run to discover all the songs on my ipod had been erased. I did not have time to fix it so after grumbling and taking the ipod back inside, I had to run for an hour without it. And I have not been so spiritually attentive and alive on a run in years.

Another example from yesterday morning. I told my boys that they could find a movie on Netflix to watch. And when I came back 8 minutes later, they were still scrolling and bickering and unable to find something they wanted to watch.

Think about it-- 60 years ago, children were amazed that there was a box in their homes with moving pictures on it; they were thrilled with any animation that came across the t.v.! 30 years ago, the VCR gave us more options and we start spending 20 or 30 minutes in Blockbuster trying to agree on something. Now the movie theater with thousands of selections is in our home, not to mention the video game arcade, and this is great in many ways. But we need to be careful. We have so many options and so much immediate control; so many things that are at our service. I worry that we are slowly losing our ground; our natural roots; our creatureliness; our need for other humans and their help.

This was never an issue for the wandering prophet Jesus and his band of followers. They were ragged, dirty, hungry, dependent upon others to be fed—gleaning in the fields when no one would feed them; sometimes forgetting to wash their hands because they were so hungry.

This Greek woman was low to the ground as she bowed before Jesus. She knew that something which was not natural was ailing her daughter. And she needed help. Jesus affirmed her humility and her wisdom. His smile let her know that he was teasing and he lifted her up and gave her the help she needed-- freeing her daughter from a demon.

Our created nature is not what ails us. What ails us is the unworldly and unnatural distortion of God's created order; something which turns stewardship into possessiveness; sharing into hoarding; security into greed and safety into defensiveness. It turns monogamous sexual joy into joyless promiscuity; it turns concern for others into anxiety and apathy.

We need help in overcoming these unnatural powers. So, like the woman, we turn to the Word and the body of Israel's God as the woman did; that's what distinguished Jews and Gentiles; and he's the One who brings us together. So when we find that Word through worship and small group discipleship in the body of Israel's God, we receive our inheritance as children.

Jesus smiles down on us and lets us know that he was just being playful. We may be a bit like dogs or even insects compared to the One through whom all things were created. But he lifts us off of our hands and knees. His Spirit fills us and gradually drives out of us all the evil powers that weigh us down. He points to a seat at the table that was always had our name on it because we too are beloved children of God, just like the Jews and just like Jesus.

Now would be the perfect time for a segue into communion...; instead let us go to the font and remember the everpouring fountain of God's love and mercy...

grants us a seat at his table. We receive our inheritance as children of God.

This was

We are all Children of God; Jesus love of the sinner teaches us this. Mark is teaches us this in chapter 7 by having Jesus declare all foods clean and through this passage with Jesus affirming and healing a Greek woman. The question is whether we are interested in receiving our inheritance now as this woman did. Will we find the humility...the faith...the crying out to God for salvation...

When people come to us for help

smiles down and lets us know that we will be set free from unnatural powers that pervert our spirits and confuse our minds and weigh down our hearts. The passions that lead to infidelity; the

We hear Word that our humility and faith mak

When we are humble, God lifts us up and lets us know that he has set a place for us at the table.

I think Jesus was a little upset when this woman came to him. Jesus himself

It is not easy to approach someone for help, especially when it comes to something shunned by the world around us.

are always tempted to think of ourselves as above and

Another rather astounding passage this week...

Was Jesus challenging her? Being coy with her?

Jews were chosen among all the peoples of the earth and blessed with the power and the presence of God; the knowledge of God's laws and ways; the assurance of God's love and grace.

Humility before the Word of God.

So the bread is the freeing of people from demonic powers; Jesus is that bread and he was a Jew whose mission was to feed Jews; to free them by calling them back to God.

Focus-- The majesty of God leads us to fall to the table of his mercy and gratefully feed on the crumbs of Life that have fallen to the floor. There God picks us up and lets us know that we are children, deserving of a seat with him.

and then reorients us and stabilizes us

Let me begin by acknowledging

Jesus was lying low...he had once again challenged the authorities and went somewhere where he hoped he would not be recognized. He wanted things to calm down a bit...

And his mission was to His own people. He was bringing to completion the purpose of Israel and when that was complete, the prophecies of the Gentiles being drawn to the God of Israel would begin.

Distractions and further publicity...

I cannot do this Jesus. I need you to feed my child. I need you to not hold my own lack of righteousness against me or her. I know that I let my passions get the best of me. But I come before you humbly and pray for the crumbs of your liberation. Make things new for us...

This is the humility with which we must approach God and each other.

Mark moving us toward the full inclusion of Gentiles in the covenant of God...a. declaring all foods clean in the previous passage; b. this healing of the Greek woman, c. the Roman soldier who was the first to declare Jesus the Son of God

Uncleanness is not a matter of cultural identity

The humility of the Greek woman...