



## passing the crumbs



<Matthew 15:21-28>

<sup>21</sup> From there, Jesus went to the regions of Tyre and Sidon. <sup>22</sup> A Canaanite woman from those territories came out and shouted, "Show me mercy, Son of David. My daughter is suffering terribly from demon possession."

<sup>23</sup> But he didn't respond to her at all. His disciples came and urged him, "Send her away; she keeps shouting out after us." <sup>24</sup> Jesus replied, "I've been sent only to the lost sheep, the people of Israel."

<sup>25</sup> But she knelt before him and said, "Lord, help me." <sup>26</sup> He replied, "It is not good to take the children's bread and toss it to dogs." <sup>27</sup> She said, "Yes, Lord. **But even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall off their masters' table.**"

<sup>28</sup> Jesus answered, "Woman, you have great faith. It will be just as you wish." And right then her daughter was healed.



Our sermon series is about how we keep wanting to put Jesus in a box, but how he is always breaking boundaries. We called it living outside the box. Two weeks ago we talked about the miracle of the feeding of the 5000 and having a boxed in mentally when our logic said it was not possible to feed the crowd. Last week Prof. David Welbourn preached on both Jesus and Peter walking on water and pondered how we can live outside the box of earthly demands.



In today's scripture, Jesus has put himself in a box. It takes a voice from an outsider to challenge his viewpoint. Jesus is very human in this story and not very nice or kind. Jesus calls the woman in our scripture, the "Canaanite woman." The Promised Land that Moses led the Israelites to was Canaan, so the Jews and the Canaanites were historically enemies. But the name Canaan was no longer on the map – Sidon and Tyre were now in the region known as Phoenicia. But he did not call her a Syrophenician. Calling her a Canaanite woman emphasizes that she is part of an enemy people. Jesus understood his mission as being to the Jews only and not to the non-Jews.



Then Jesus talks about dogs. Dogs were wild animals and were considered unclean. To call a Gentile a dog was a derogatory statement. **This is a tough passage to study.** This would have been considered a cross-cultural insult during Jesus' time, and it is certainly an insult today. What Jesus says here is problematic. **It is hard to hear him say this. Even Jesus must face his own prejudices, and listen to God's promptings and change, and step outside of the box.**

We call the Bible the Word of God, and it is. But God didn't stop speaking when the ink dried on the last page. God continues to speak to us today through the Holy Spirit. In John 15:26, Jesus says: "When the Companion comes, whom I will send from the Father—the Spirit of Truth who

*proceeds from the Father—he will testify about me.*” Clearly Jesus believed that God would still be speaking after he had gone. Jesus’ scriptures were what we call the Old Testament or the Hebrew Scriptures. And he heard his call to be a leader, a prophet, and a shepherd to the people of Israel, the Jews, whose story is told in the OT.



But then along comes the Canaanite woman, the Syrophenician woman. And the Syrophenician woman was not unlike today’s mothers. We talk about mothers being like “mama bears protecting their cubs.” When a mum is on a mission for the sake of her child, there is not much that will stop her. Mums find the courage to do things they would not normally do, especially to get help for a sick child. So the Syrophenician woman sees Jesus. And she does the only thing she can do. She speaks her truth.



And when Jesus compares her to a dog, saying “It is not good to take the children’s bread and toss it to dogs,” she claims her dignity and she courageously nails him giving her perspective on his actions. “**Yes, but even the dogs get the crumbs.**” She asks him to see things from her perspective. She asks to be treated at least as well as the dogs. She wakes him up to his own bias.

Jesus changes his mind because of an encounter with this woman. **Jesus modeled what it is like to change our minds and initiate healing.** Jesus did not just dismiss the woman, or tell her off for being sassy with him. **Jesus listened and assessed what he was hearing.**

God was speaking something new to Jesus, something that was not in the Scriptures. And Jesus commends the woman for her faith, for speaking up, for fighting for what she believes, for being prepared to question the status quo. **Jesus’ box was enlarged by this encounter.** He was transformed. He began to see his whole ministry in a different light. And he passed this view onto those who came after him, until Paul responds with: *There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. (Gal 3:28).*

God was speaking directly to Jesus, not just through the scriptures, and God speaks to us directly too. We are a community here. We are a community of different people brought here together by our shared commitment to be disciples of JC. Each of us has a story to tell. Some were born here. Others were not. Some are old. Others are young. Some are healthy, some are sick. Some are struggling to make ends meet. Others have savings. Some were brought up in the church. Others have recently found Christ. **Transformation happens when we listen to someone else’s story that doesn’t fit with our understanding and we are challenged as to what we believe and how to respond. There is lots of life to be found outside the box and even the leftovers can be nourishing.**



With the death this summer of George Floyd, I suggested that we come to together to have a book study of the book, *Why I’m No Longer Talking to White People about Race* by Reni Eddo-Lodge. So 14 of us have been gathering every Thursday morning. You are still welcome to join us! The material she presents is not easy to read or discuss. It is hard to listen and not argue back, and it is more comfortable to skirt around the topic. And yet it is only when we do that deep listening and put aside our defensiveness that there is room for the Spirit to change our hearts.



**The Syrophenician woman struggles to be heard. She cries out. She kneels and begs. Jesus rejects her. Finally she says something that jolts Jesus and he relents and grants her request. What does it take to be heard? When will we be jolted?**

What views are we espousing or implicitly passing on to our children, grandchildren, great grandchildren, nieces, nephews, neighborhood children? You have many opportunities to influence a young person. Talk to the children in your life and ask them some pointed questions. Yes, conversations around racism are uncomfortable to have. Often we do not even see or notice our own blindness until someone points it out to us. We need to be talking to our family, friends and neighbors.

God speaks to us as we rub up against one another sharing our stories. And it is in those moments as we speak our truth and open ourselves to the words of others that transformation happens. Jesus changed. We can change. This nation can change. And people of faith can lead the way. Because I hope we are building a community here where we are not afraid to have our faith challenged by listening to another's point of view. A community that listens to the new ways in which God is still speaking. A community where as we share our stories, our witness, our truth, then hope emerges, and healing and wholeness happens. Because God can work through all circumstances and promises justice and a peace that passes all understanding.

Now, I've approached this scripture today with us identifying with Jesus and having our boxed-in thinking challenged. We don't tend to think of ourselves as the underdog. We want to be the strong one with power. I want to finish by having us identify for a few moments with the Syrophenician Woman. I think that there is something of her in all of us. There are times in our lives when we feel excluded and on the outside, times when we are desperate and fighting for hope, times when we recognize our powerlessness. **So where do we find hope when things are rough?** Where do we find hope when it appears that God is silent, which was Jesus' first response to the Syrophenician Woman? Where do we find hope when our own power is insufficient? I'd like to make one suggestion.



**We can rest and trust in the promise of those crumbs from the table.** Those crumbs are for us. And they are not insignificant either. This story of the Syrophenician Woman comes just one chapter in Matthew after the story of the feeding of the 5000 with its 12 baskets of left-over crumbs. And just after today's reading comes the story of the feeding of the 4000 with 7 baskets of leftover crumbs. Seven being a symbol of wholeness.



God hasn't stopped speaking. God isn't done yet. It doesn't matter who we are. We are not outside the circle of God's love and care. There's still a word for us. **Crumbs of grace, of love are ours.** We have that as a promise. So go and ask for them, claim them. **There's a take-away box for us!**

I encourage us all to reach out to one another. To listen. To journey with. To trust in the promise of the crumbs, of the grace, that brings hope. To know that God's grace is sufficient. To experience God still speaking to us in new and powerful ways. To **pass the crumbs** and to **live outside of the box.**

Thanks be to God.  
Amen.

### Series Description

We try to box God in, but God is always breaking out of the box and shattering our understandings of life in God's kingdom.

### Resources

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Park, Eric. "Jesus, a Canaanite Woman, and an Expanded Vision of the Kingdom of God" in *A Gracious Graffiti Blog*. 14<sup>th</sup> August, 2020. <https://pewboy.net/2020/08/14/jesus-a-canaanite-woman-and-an-expanded-vision-of-the-kingdom-of-god/>.