

#57

January 13, 2019

Mark 7:24-31

## Good news: No Boundaries Around Grace

<sup>24</sup> Jesus left that place and went into the region of Tyre. He didn't want anyone to know that he had entered a house, but he couldn't hide. <sup>25</sup> In fact, a woman whose young daughter was possessed by an unclean spirit heard about him right away. She came and fell at his feet. <sup>26</sup> The woman was Greek, Syrophenician by birth. She begged Jesus to throw the demon out of her daughter. <sup>27</sup> He responded, "The children have to be fed first. It isn't right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs."

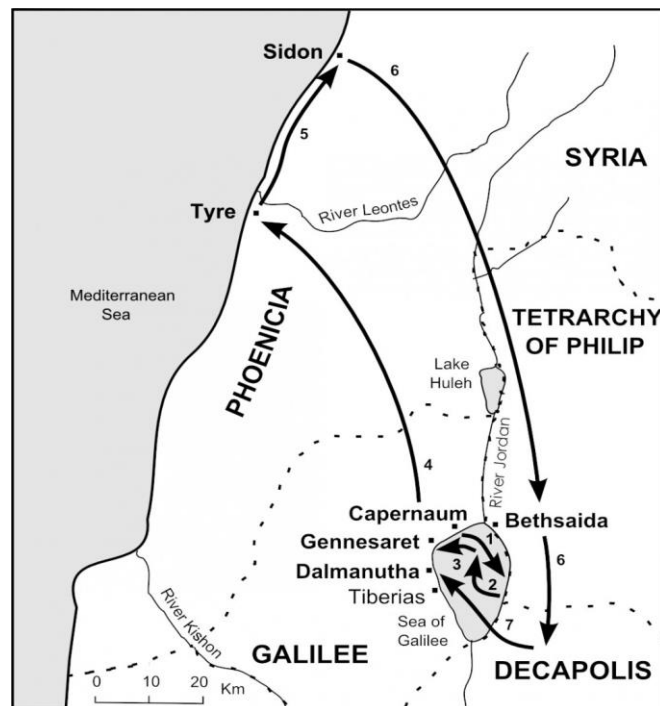
<sup>28</sup> But she answered, "Lord, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs."

<sup>29</sup> "Good answer!" he said. "Go on home. The demon has already left your daughter." <sup>30</sup> When she returned to her house, she found the child lying on the bed and the demon gone.

## Good news: No Boundaries Around Grace

I love this passage. For me this passage shows the abundance of God's grace. There are no boundaries geographically, physically, mentally or spiritually. God is full of grace that God gives to all – regardless of the barriers we might create or imagine. This marvelous, infinite, matchless grace is greater than even our sin and shame.

Jesus left the place.



Last Sunday we were in Gennesaret by the Sea of Galilee (#3 on this map). We were with the disciples, Pharisees and legal experts and multitudes. Jesus revealed what matters the most. We can say nice prayers, we can do pretty good ministries, sing beautifully and have a good standing in the community, but what God sees and cares about is your heart. External rituals can be helpful but God is concerned about your heart and wants it to be pure. God cares what you think and what you dwell on. He washes you clean by the blood of the Lamb and he wants you to stay pure by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Today we move across the mountains to the coastal region of Tyre and Sidon (#4 on the map). It is about 40 miles from Galilee outside the boundary of Israel. Jesus goes there because he wants to be alone and not known. He knows His mission is to the lost sheep of Israel and he wants to stay focused. He is not very successful. Word got out that Jesus was in town.



“In fact, a woman, whose young daughter was possessed by an unclean spirit, heard about him right away. She came and fell at his feet”. Right away! As soon as he entered the house, a woman heard about him and came to see him. A woman speaking in public, she is crossing ethnic and socioeconomic boundaries. She is also crossing the gender boundaries. She is far away from the covenant people. As far as you can go. She is off the page. God’s covenant people are Jews. Jesus is the Messiah for the Jews.

No doubt she had heard about the healing of the demoniac and the pigs in Decapolis.

She comes to Jesus in desperate need -- desperate need. What do you need more than anything? What is your most desperate need? Are you so content that you do not need or even want anything from God? Is your heart content to be filled with junk and passing entertainment? The truth is that we all need Jesus more than anything else?

She came and fell at his feet. When you are desperate, pride means nothing. In humility you recognize the Lord's majesty and power and your own limits and weakness.



When we lived in the little town of Wilmore, Kentucky I was introduced to tornados. There is nothing like that in Lithuania. They seemed scary but when you hear about them TV it is not the same. Andrew told me if he is not at home and we hear the sirens for tornado we should go under the stairs. During our second year in Wilmore, I was alone at home with little Emma, I heard the sirens and looked at my phone. Lo and behold, there were warnings about a tornado in our area. I opened the door.... The color of the clouds... The sounds you hear...

Immediately my faith reached a different level. I did not have that buddy Jesus image anymore or God with a rainbow promise. Suddenly I was face to face with big, huge, enormous power and my own powerless condition. I feared God. I saw pictures of Sodom and Gomorra in my head. I envisioned the end of the world. I can honestly tell

you: to this day I still have carry a fear of the Lord. I received a new found reverence for the Almighty God who created us. I understood more what a mighty God I serve. I got a little taste of the awesomeness of God. I realized anew what truly Jesus means to me. He is the Son of God and only because of His love and sacrifices I have connection and access to God.

It was close but we were safe.

This woman is desperate. What does she have to lose? She approaches the most powerful man on earth, who calms the wind and the waves, casts out demons, walks on water, feeds thousands of people with a couple fish and a little bread, makes the lame to walk, the blind to see and the deaf to hear.

She knows who He is and what He can do. She dares to come close and fall at his feet. "She begged Jesus to cast the demon out of her daughter". She begged -- not simply place a request. She knew she did not deserve even to speak to Him. The life of her daughter was at stake.

Jesus responded: "The children have to be fed first. It isn't right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs." Wow. You all heard it. Most of us in this building are Gentiles. How do we make this fit our understanding of the loving Father of us all and the wonderful grace of Jesus which has no boundaries?

It is interesting to read the commentaries. One of my favorites claims that Jesus was just joking. I do not think so. There is nothing funny here.

How can you preach from the Bible and say it was a joke? We do not know what kind of tone he used or the facial expression of Jesus. All we know is what Jesus said.

I am amazed at how many ways we can preach from the same verse and be absolutely and fundamentally different.

Some say we should think of dogs as beloved loved pets. "Puppies" makes it sound not so harsh.

Some will argue this text proves Jesus was a racist. This is an interesting thought as we approach next Sunday which is Martin Luther King weekend.

All I can say: Forgive us Lord, for we understand so little. We try to make the story fit our theology instead of letting the story speak to our condition.

Jesus said: "The children have to be fed first." Jesus came to bring salvation first to the children of Israel. According to Romans 1:16, "The gospel is first for the Jew, and also for the Gentile".

How does it make you, as a Gentile, feel? It is tempting to simply ignore this passage. We want to pick the cherries we like.

At the first glance it looks like Jesus is saying that there is not enough grace, salvation for her...there are just crumbs of food: The leftovers from the children...

If I had dogs and if I loved them so very much that they would be part of my family, what would I do first? Would I feed the dogs first or my children? I am pretty certain, no matter how much I loved the dogs, I would feed my children first.

It was an insult.

Who wants to be called a dog? There is nothing new here. It was common for Jews to call Gentiles dogs. Very likely the Gentiles did not use terms of endearment for



the Jews. This sort of language was used in that culture and in that period of time, but it still is hard to wrap our heads around gentle, sweet, tender Jesus talking like this.

So what would you do if you heard these words from Jesus? Would you be hurt? Would you just stand up and leave? ...Would you have cursed even the thought of coming and hoping?

Do you see crumbs as positive or negative? For me it depends how hungry I am.

Are you so hungry you would take whatever you can get? I am so hungry for God's healing, for His words, I would be glad to have crumbs. I believe that crumbs from Jesus are better than the world's cheap food.

It is hard. We teach our children you can have all you want. You can be whatever you want. You are the best. You deserve it. I need so much wisdom to be careful and teach that others are good too. It is the hardest thing to teach kids to rejoice when others win.

I love my children and I want them to have self-esteem and do their very best, but not to the point that they think they are the center of the world where they cannot respect, do not want to wait, not work, not be part of the team or not be able to say congratulations to the person who won.

What do you think you deserve from God? Did you earn something to be saved, accepted, seated at the table? What I deserve is death. The consequence of sin is death. I am a sinner. Have mercy on me, God.

The Syrophenician woman did not walk away. What would she gain if she did? She said: "Lord". She accepted what God is saying, even though it sounds so unfair. Can you accept God and what he is giving you?



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

She accepted what Jesus was saying. She did not walk away. She said, **crumbs are good enough for me as long it is from your table, Lord.**

Jesus came as a Jew to Jews, but it does not mean we Gentiles are less. It is a sequence, chronological, not importance. I am the fourth child in my family. I am the last. Am I mad because I was not born first? Not a bit. Did I get less love? I think the opposite. In the very first book of the Bible, we read: Through Abraham, "all peoples on earth will be blessed". All people. The gospel of the kingdom was to be a blessing to the whole world, but it was natural that it be first proclaimed to Israel.

Jesus replied: Good answer. Go on home. The demon has already left your daughter. Demon already left? When? Already – past tense? When did it happen? When Jesus saw her faith? When he saw her heart?

Jesus had a very little time and his focus was to start with God's chosen nation. Here He shows that God's grace has no limits or boundaries. This woman was not in his plan and far from being a Hebrew male

Later, Paul clearly stated: There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (Gal 3:28). There is no question, we all are saved by faith Jesus. We are adopted through Christ as children of God.

Dr Tennent gave a great example. It really helped me to understand the picture. Last Sunday was a very busy day. We had cleaning day at the church, we had Annie's birthday party at Morristown and I invited you all to come to our home. I finally got home at 4:15. Guests would arrive in just an hour. My mom is far from finishing the meal. Even though I asked the rest of the family to clean, the house was not very clean in my eyes.

I jumped to the task putting stuff away, helping my mother, and helping Ella with her homework. I imagined the chaos if someone would happen to arrive half an hour early. I would not be happy at all. I would be panicking. It is not time yet. Didn't you know better? The vacuum is still going; the kitchen is a mess; the meal is not even in the oven.

I would be so glad to welcome anyone in 30 minutes. You cannot ignore somebody who is knocking at your door, especially people you have invited. I would open the door and welcome you, not happily but with a forced smile. I would make it work because I realize what is most important.

The Syrophenician woman came just a little bit too early. God saw her faith and her humility and granted what she asked for.

We must continually ask ourselves as recipients of God's grace: How far can my grace go? Are there individuals I believe are not supposed to be granted grace. Are they outside of my boundary and beyond my range. Is my grace limited?

One day the man knocked at the pearly gates. St. Peter said, "Welcome to heaven. Let me show you around."

They came to one door and St. Peter said, "Be very quiet."

The man heard the singing and rejoicing in that room. "Why do I have to be quiet here?"

St. Peter explained, "Those are the Methodists and they think they are the only ones in heaven."

One good thing is that we cannot choose who will go to heaven with us. I know I will be very surprised. God's grace has no boundaries.

Today we celebrate God's Communion. It is called a means of grace. We will receive some crumbs. We do not need to give everyone a full loaf of bread. Bread is broken and cut into little pieces. What does this little crumb represent? It reminds us of Christ's presence and fullness of life through faith in Him. This little piece of bread reminds us that one day we will sit at the table with the Lord and will feast at his heavenly banquet. Would you receive what God is given to you? A little fragment of grace is more than enough. God's mercy and grace are limitless and have no boundaries.