

"SAVED BY A CRUMB"
MATTHEW 15:21-28
TWELFTH S. A. PENTECOST
MESSIAH, BOERNE
AUGUST 20, 2023

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY
SPIRIT. AMEN.

TEXT: MATTHEW 15:21-28

DEAR FRIENDS IN CHRIST:

STORIES OF HUMAN SURVIVAL AND RESCUE SOMETIMES AMAZE
ME. FOR EXAMPLE, SEVERAL YEARS AGO I REMEMBER HEARING THE
STORY ABOUT A MAN WHO WAS LOST FOR OVER A WEEK IN THE
MOUNTAINS OF WASHINGTON STATE DURING A BLIZZARD. HE WAS ON
HIS WAY HOME AND ACCIDENTALLY TOOK A WRONG TURN. ONCE HE
REALIZED HIS MISTAKE, HE PULLED OFF TO THE SIDE OF THE ROAD
AND WAITED, TRUSTING THAT SOMEONE WOULD COME LOOKING FOR
HIM. AFTER HE WAS FOUND DAYS LATER, HE TOLD HIS RESCUERS
THAT HE HAD SURVIVED BY DRINKING MELTED SNOW AND EATING
SMALL PIECES OF A CANDY BAR HE FOUND IN HIS GLOVE
COMPARTMENT. MORE AMAZING THAN THAT, HOWEVER, IS THE STORY
OF THE CANAANITE WOMAN IN OUR GOSPEL TEXT TODAY. HER STORY
OF HUMAN SURVIVAL AND RESCUE BY JESUS JUST ABOUT BEATS THEM
ALL, FOR SHE WAS SAVED BY A CRUMB!

ONE FRIDAY NIGHT SOME YEARS AGO, MY WIFE AND I WATCHED
A MOVIE ENTITLED, "CASE 39," A HORROR FILM ABOUT A SOCIAL
WORKER WHO LIVED FOR A WHILE WITH A YOUNG GIRL EITHER

POSSESSED BY A DEMON OR THE DEMON HIMSELF. NOW, I'M NOT SUGGESTING YOU WATCH THE MOVIE, BUT IT DID GIVE ME SOME IDEA ABOUT THE TREMENDOUS STRESS AND ANXIETY—INDEED, THE *TERROR*—THE CANAANITE WOMAN MUST HAVE BEEN DEALING WITH WHILE LIVING WITH HER DEMON-POSSESSED DAUGHTER. OUR TEXT TELLS US THAT, WHILE JESUS WAS TRAVELING NORTH THROUGH THE REGION OF TYRE AND SIDON, WHICH IS THE SOUTHERN PART OF THE PRESENT-DAY COUNTRY OF LEBANON, THE WOMAN CAME OUT AND "WAS CRYING, 'HAVE MERCY ON ME, O LORD, SON OF DAVID; MY DAUGHTER IS SEVERELY OPPRESSED BY A DEMON'" (V 22). ST. MARK ALSO TELLS US ABOUT THIS EVENT, AND HE SAYS THAT THE WOMAN, "HAVING HEARD OF HIM," CAME AND FELL DOWN BEFORE HIS FEET (7:25). HIGHLY MOTIVATED, THE WOMAN CAME TO JESUS, WHOM SHE BELIEVED WAS THE PROMISED MESSIAH OF ISRAEL, AND BEGGED HIM TO HELP HER IN HER GREAT SPIRITUAL DISTRESS.

NOW, AS WE HAVE SEEN AND HEARD, JESUS CAME INTO THE WORLD TO SAVE *ALL* PEOPLE FROM THEIR SINS, AND HE OFTEN WORKED MIRACLES TO SHOW THAT HE HAD THE POWER AND AUTHORITY TO FORGIVE SINS (MT 4:23-25; 9:6). THE REQUEST OF THE CANAANITE WOMAN IN OUR TEXT SEEMS LIKE SOMETHING JESUS NOT ONLY *COULD* DO BUT *WOULD* DO—*GLADLY*. HOW SURPRISING, THEN, WHEN "HE DID NOT ANSWER HER A WORD" (V 23). NEVERTHELESS, THE WOMAN DID NOT STOP CRYING OUT FOR JESUS' HELP, EVEN THOUGH HIS DISCIPLES TRIED TO DISCOURAGE HER AND ASKED

JESUS TO "SEND HER AWAY" (V 23). FINALLY, JESUS EXPLAINS HIS BEHAVIOR, SAYING, "I WAS SENT ONLY TO THE LOST SHEEP OF THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL" (V 24).

HOW DOES JESUS' REFUSAL TO HELP THE CANAANITE WOMAN AND HER DAUGHTER MAKE YOU *FEEL*? DO YOU FEEL *EXCLUDED*, SINCE YOU, TOO, ARE PERHAPS A WOMAN . . . A GENTILE? YOU AND I KNOW THE REST OF THE STORY, HOW JESUS CAME TO SEEK AND TO SAVE THE LOST, INCLUDING THE GENTILE NATIONS. WE MAY ALSO KNOW HOW GOD HAS GRACIOUSLY HEARD *OUR* PRAYERS AND HELPED US IN *OUR* TIME OF NEED. WHEN JESUS DIED ON THE CROSS FOR THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS, HE DIED FOR *ALL* PEOPLES—FOR JEWS AND GENTILES ALIKE, NOT JUST FOR "THE LOST SHEEP OF THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL." SO WHY DOES JESUS ACT THIS WAY?

THE KEY TO UNDERSTANDING OUR LORD'S WORDS AND BEHAVIOR IS TO REALIZE THAT HE IS USING THEM AS THE MEANS TO *STRENGTHEN* THE WOMAN'S FAITH AS WELL AS OUR OWN. BEHIND EVERY APPARENT REBUFF LIES A SILENT "YES," AND SO SHE CONTINUES TO BEG THE LORD JESUS TO HELP HER, EVEN AFTER HE APPARENTLY CUTS HER OFF BY TELLING HER, "IT IS NOT RIGHT TO TAKE THE CHILDREN'S BREAD AND THROW IT TO THE DOGS" (V 26). THUS, JESUS SEEMINGLY TELLS THE WOMAN, "NOT ONLY ARE YOU EXCLUDED FROM GOD'S HELP BECAUSE YOU ARE NOT OF THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL, BUT YOU ARE ALSO AN UNCLEAN SINNER—A GENTILE *DOG*."

NOW, MANY PEOPLE WOULD RESPOND TO JESUS' WORDS DEFENSIVELY, SAYING, "I'M NOT AN UNCLEAN SINNER, A 'DOG.' I'M ACTUALLY A VERY GOOD AND DECENT HUMAN BEING. I GO TO CHURCH REGULARLY AND SUPPORT THE CHURCH WITH MY OFFERINGS. I LOVE MY WIFE AND CHILDREN, AND TAKE CARE OF THEM—AND MY PETS, TOO." THIS IS THE WRONG APPROACH, HOWEVER. LISTEN TO WHAT THE WOMAN SAYS. FIRST, SHE ACKNOWLEDGES THAT SHE IS A SINNER UNWORTHY OF JESUS' HELP AND, AS LUTHER WRITES, "CATCHES GOD IN HIS OWN JUDGMENT." SHE SAYS, SO TO SPEAK, LORD, IT IS TRUE. I AM A SINNER AND NOT WORTHY OF THY GRACE; BUT STILL THOU HAST PROMISED SINNERS FORGIVENESS, AND THOU ART COME NOT TO CALL THE RIGHTEOUS, BUT, AS ST. PAUL SAYS IN 1 TIM 1,15, 'TO SAVE SINNERS.' BEHOLD, THEN MUST GOD ACCORDING TO HIS OWN JUDGEMENT HAVE MERCY UPON US.

SO MUST IT BE FOR YOU AND ME ALSO. LIKE THE CANAANITE WOMAN, WE MUST HOLD FIRM TO GOD'S WORD AND PROMISE. AND SINCE GOD IS FAITHFUL TO HIS PROMISES (1 TIM 2:13), THEN, RATHER THAN TRYING TO JUSTIFY OURSELVES (WHICH ALWAYS ENDS IN FAILURE), WE MUST CLAIM THE RIGHTS THAT GOD HAS GIVEN TO ALL SINNERS IN JESUS CHRIST, NAMELY, THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS (LK 24:47). THEN, LIKE THE CANAANITE WOMAN, WE WILL NOT ONLY EAT THE CRUMBS UNDER THE TABLE AS THE LITTLE HOUSE DOGS DO, BUT WE WILL ALSO CLAIM OUR RIGHTS AS CHILDREN OF GOD IN HIS HOUSEHOLD AND HAVE GOD AS OUR PORTION ACCORDING TO THE PLEASURE OF HIS GOOD AND GRACIOUS WILL (JN 1:12).

IN THE NEWSPAPER, *THE LUTHERAN LAYMEN* (MARCH-APRIL 2011), AN INTERESTING ARTICLE WAS PUBLISHED. IN IT, THE AUTHOR ASKS,

'IS ANYTHING WORSE THAN BEING LOST?' 'YES,' HE ASSERTS: 'WHEN NO ONE IS LOOKING FOR YOU.' IT TAKES A FEW MOMENTS FOR THE TRUE VALUE OF THAT RESPONSE TO SINK IN. 'WHAT IF THERE WERE NO EVANGELISTS, WHAT IF THERE WAS NO VISITATION OR BIBLES PLACED IN HOTELS AND MOTELS, HOSPITALS, JAILS, MILITARY INDUCTION CENTERS, OR SCHOOLYARDS? WHAT IF NO ONE WAS SEARCHING FOR THE LOST?' THAT'S WHAT MAKES CHRISTIAN OUTREACH SO VITALLY NECESSARY!

THROUGH THE CHURCH GOD REACHES OUT AND PROMSES TO SAVE *EVERYONE* WHO BELIEVES IN THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST, AS ST. PETER SAYS, "THERE IS SALVATION IN NO ONE ELSE, FOR THERE IS NO OTHER NAME UNDER HEAVEN GIVEN AMONG MEN BY WHICH WE MUST BE SAVED" (ACTS 4:12).

AND GOD REACHES OUT NOT ONLY THROUGH HIS WORD, BUT ALSO THROUGH THE SACRAMENT OF HOLY BAPTISM. IN HOLY BAPTISM, GOD MAKES US MEMBERS OF HIS FAMILY BY GIVING US THE HOLY SPIRIT. HE ADOPTS US AS HIS OWN CHILDREN AND GIVES US THE RIGHTS OF INHERITANCE IN HIS HEAVENLY KINGDOM. HE TAKES US POOR, UNWORTHY SINNERS, AND CLOTHES US IN THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF CHRIST, OUR SAVIOR. AND THEN HE FEEDS US AT HIS TABLE IN THE SACRAMENT OF THE ALTAR WITH THE TRUE BODY AND BLOOD OF HIS ONLY-BEGOTTEN SON, JESUS CHRIST, FOR THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS, LIFE, AND SALVATION.

DEAR FRIENDS, SINCE YOU AND I ARE IN SUCH GREAT NEED AS SINNERS, GOD SENT HIS ONLY-BEGOTTEN SON INTO THE WORLD TO SAVE LOST SOULS LIKE YOU AND ME. HE SAVES US WHEN WE, LIKE THE CANAANITE WOMAN, ACKNOWLEDGE OUR UNWORTHINESS BEFORE GOD AND APPEAL FOR HELP ON THE BASIS OF HIS GRACE ALONE. AND HE PROMISES TO HAVE MERCY UPON *ALL* WHO CALL UPON HIM IN THEIR TIME OF NEED—FROM *EVERY* NATION—AND TO GRANT THEM SALVATION THROUGH THE LORD JESUS CHRIST. YOU SEE, GOD OPPOSES THE PROUD, BUT HE GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE AND GRANTS THEM SALVATION; IN JESUS' NAME. AMEN.