

SEQUOYAH HILLS  
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

**“Food for the Road: Begging for Crumbs”**

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**Mark 7: 24-37**

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As you may remember we have been talking about food for the road as we navigate discipleship. We’ve been looking at the Gospel of Mark. In the last few weeks, we have explored how much the law and tradition play in discipleship, empty discipleship, and if what goes into our mouths is what defiles or what comes out of our mouths. Today, we will be exploring two healings that took place, and what we can learn from them, even if they might be crumbs. Let’s go to God’s word.

**Luke 7:24-37**

<sup>24</sup> From there he set out and went away to the region of Tyre.<sup>[a]</sup> He entered a house and did not want anyone to know he was there. Yet he could not escape notice,<sup>25</sup> but a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately heard about him, and she came and bowed down at his feet.<sup>26</sup> Now the woman was a gentile, of Syrophenician origin. She begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter.<sup>27</sup> He said to her, “Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs.”<sup>28</sup> But she answered him, “Sir,<sup>[b]</sup> even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.”<sup>29</sup> Then he said to her, “For saying that, you may go—the demon has left your daughter.”<sup>30</sup> And when she went home, she found the child lying on the bed and the demon gone.

<sup>31</sup> Then he returned from the region of Tyre and went by way of Sidon toward the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis.<sup>32</sup> They brought to him a deaf man who had an impediment in his speech, and they begged him to lay his hand on him.<sup>33</sup> He took him aside in private, away from the crowd, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spat and touched his tongue.<sup>34</sup> Then looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, “Ephphatha,” that is, “Be opened.”<sup>35</sup> And his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly.<sup>36</sup> Then Jesus<sup>[c]</sup> ordered them to tell no one, but the more he ordered them, the more zealously they proclaimed it.<sup>37</sup> They were astounded beyond measure, saying, “He has done everything well; he even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak.”

Will you go with me in prayer? Dear Lord, open our hearts to hear what you would have us hear. Help us to be open enough to be brave in understanding your Word. May the words of my

mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. **Amen.**

Before I begin, I want to let you know that what you say in this room, stays in this room. That was meant to make you feel safe, but now some of you might be a little nervous!

Well, how many of you think that this scripture is. . . say. . . troubling? Okay, some of you showed some bravery there. Now you may have to be a little bolder with this next question – I have to be a little brave just asking it – If you found some of it troubling, what are they? This isn't a rhetorical question – speak up! (*possibly when Jesus refers to the woman and/or her daughter as a dog, Jesus putting his fingers in the man's ears, and spitting*) You may have to be a little bolder, raise your hands if you think that Jesus' behavior was not just troubling – it was downright rude? I must admit that I couldn't help but feel like, if Jesus' mother were there, I can imagine her yanking him up and saying, "I thought I taught you better than talking with such disrespect!" Some of you may be thinking, "Preacher! I would have thought you would've been taught better than that if you were going to be a preacher! Questioning scripture, questioning Jesus!"

But this mother of a little daughter who had a demon was bold. If you were offended at what I just asked, just imagine how offensive her boldness would have been interpreted in Jesus' time. A woman – someone who was often invisible, she had little power, she probably felt pretty isolated, especially if she had a child who had a demon – I would say, in Jesus' day, not many people wanted to associate with her. I also think it interesting that she came alone, perhaps she was raising this child alone. That would have been very difficult. She was also a Gentile – there are so many things that could have kept her felt beaten down, and alone. And to approach a rabbi?

But she did come, and she also came with humility. Scripture emphasizes that humility by not having her speak at first– the narrator spoke saying what her request was and what she did. She "bowed down at his feet. And then Jesus said that infamous, troubling, yes, even rude response, "Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair, to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." Really, Jesus? Why so harsh? Make no mistake, Jesus meant it in a demeaning way. To refer to someone as a dog was meant to be humiliating.

That was such a stumbling block for me for so long. I must tell you that this was the lectionary scripture that I had when I was preaching a trial sermon at my first call after seminary. And they were used to lectionary preaching, so I went with the lectionary text. I must admit I didn't feel so bold then!

And then there is how much she must have gone through to gather up the courage to come, and then to think Jesus wasn't going to grant her request? Have any of you been denied medical care, or couldn't afford a much-needed medication because it was too expensive? Or has anyone you loved been denied it? It is such a feeling of powerlessness, it can make one feel invisible, not

worthy, alone. And for Jesus to say this, referring to you, because of your race or origin, or faith, as a dog?

Now there have been a lot of interpretations about why he would call her a dog and his initial response. But most of those interpretations have flaws in them – some say that he came to the chosen people – Israel, and they should be taught first. But that sounds like there is only so much healing to go around. That doesn't make sense. And then there is the explanation Jesus was simply testing her, but that has its flaws as well. I won't go into all the other explanations, because I realized while studying this, it doesn't sound like we will ever understand Jesus' response. But I believe we have much to learn from this passionate woman, this determined woman. And it sounds like Jesus came to some realization from her answer, when she talked back, with her words, "Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." Boldness, with also a sense of respect. Faith takes a lot of boldness and bravery but also humility.

In the next part of the scripture there is also a man who probably felt invisible, alone, powerlessness, as he was deaf, and had a speech impediment. Like he was also an outcast. And like the woman, they came begging for Jesus to heal him. And Jesus does something pretty troubling, some would say gross. He took him aside in private . . . and put his fingers into his ears, and he spat and touched his tongue. Then looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, "Ephphatha," meaning, 'Be opened.' And immediately his ears were opened and his tongue released."

Both of these people's lives were changed. It wasn't just the physical challenges that were healed. It was kingdom crumbs who healed them, and so they were also healed by becoming part of their communities again, they were made whole in so many ways. It took boldness by the woman, and by the friends who took the man to Jesus and spoke for him. Desperation can sometimes lead us into boldness and even talking back to God. It keeps us in relationship with God. Have you ever noticed that after a disagreement or argument with someone, if you continue to work through the situation, and let them know how you feel, and they let you know how they feel, often it becomes a deeper and stronger relationship in spite of the disagreement? But if you stay quiet about it, the relationship often stays on the surface, or maybe even drifts apart completely?

We were talking about this passage in staff meeting, and it was a great discussion – even though not all of us agreed with one another about why Jesus said what he did. And Jay posed a great question – Where is the point in discipleship, where we can talk back to God? When, in your relationship with God, have you talked back to God? Do you feel safe talking back to God, or questioning. Some of you, might answer "never." In my work in hospice, so many times I heard people say about their sadness and their circumstances, "Who am I to question God?" or "I know I'm not supposed to question God."

But sometimes I think we just go there instinctively. Maybe it has been after a tough diagnosis, or loss of a job, or the ending of a relationship, or a death of someone you loved so much. Or in

thinking about the road to discipleship, maybe you questioned because you suffered because you stood up for what you thought was the right thing to do, what Jesus would want you to do. Discipleship isn't always easy. Especially when it calls you to do things that are counter to what the world calls you to do.

There are other examples in scripture where people question God. I know that the Psalmist often cried out to God, the prophets . . . Jesus questioned God, quoting the Psalmist, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" They were all brave, and bold. And so were 2 outsiders, and healing took place, maybe not always in ways they expected – but in more ways than one. In the name of the Creator, the Christ, and the Holy Ghost.