

Sermon 2009 Pentecost 14  
September 6, 2009  
Text: Mark 7:24-30  
Theme: "It's Good To Be A Dog"

Sometimes I envy the life of my dog, Georgie. She spends her days lying on the furniture and then jumping down when I get home and pretending that she was just running to meet me. She eats constantly and her biggest worry in a given day is getting yelled at for drinking out of the toilet which she considers a wicked treat. A dog in the average American family lives like royalty. However, in Jesus' day, it was a very different matter.

A dog to the Jewish world was a despicable creature. It was the lowest of the low. The dog was associated with that which was wild, untamed and unclean. So, the Jews of Jesus' days regularly referred to the Gentiles as dogs since they too were unclean.

Now remember, as we move along in the Gospel according to Mark these past several weeks, that Jesus has been turning the community upside down with his new teachings on what was clean and what was unclean and how it got to be that way. Remember that Jesus was a rabbi, not just some average guy sharing his opinion. He was pronouncing radical ideas here: eating with defiled hands, defilement doesn't come into you from without but out of you from within. Now he takes off for Tyre and Sidon and finds himself smack in the middle of defilement – the region of the Gentiles. So when he has the opportunity to really drive the point about uncleanness home, he turns to the Syrophenician woman and says,

"Let the children be fed first, for it is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." What? Did we hear Jesus right? Did he just imply that this poor despised woman with a demon possessed child was a dog? Yep. He sure did. Jesus is mean isn't he? But he is not just using an old slur against the Gentiles that everyone has heard a thousand times. Understand that this is not just reckless name-calling that mocks or denigrates a person's heritage or ethnicity. This is Jesus very specifically reminding the Syrophenician of her place in the order of things. It would be similar if the church was on fire and an adult male was knocking everyone out of the way to get out of the church and someone suggested that the children should be taken out first. Jesus had no fear that the Syrophenician woman would be cared for. He knew full well how things were going to play out and that her daughter was going to be healed but he took the opportunity to help the woman learn that as well.

We never know how great our faith is until it is tested, pushed to the limit, bent as far as it will go before breaking. Every day, when two-a-days start in football, Neal comes home certain that this day he will die. But he doesn't. The next day comes and his body is stronger and he knows that he

is capable of more than he thought he was. Had Jesus just healed the woman's daughter and moved on through the crowd, how would that have served her? If I just throw a couple bucks at the homeless guy who is chronically homeless, how has that served him? If I just give the answer to the high schooler who is wrestling with life's tough issues, how has that served her? The root component of grace is love, but the root component of faith is teaching. We are all teachers, but Jesus is the master.

He gave the Syrophenician woman the opportunity to proclaim a great and wonderful truth. It is good to be a dog – **if** you are the Lord's dog. So what if I am a dog – since when did the Lord stop caring for all of his creation? Since when did God stop causing the rain to fall upon the just and the unjust alike? Since when are the prophet Isaiah's words no longer true when he says that the foreigner who binds himself to the Lord will be gathered by the Lord? Fine, I'm a dog, but even the dogs are cared for by eating the crumbs from the master's table. And by the way Lord, when it comes to grace, all I need is a crumb.

She did it. She called the Lord to his promises and in so doing her faith grew 100 fold. Like Jacob, she grabbed hold of Jesus and would not let go without the promised blessing. How long does it take us before we learn to call the Lord to his promises and move on? First he loves it. Second, it works! Why wrestle with a problem that is too big for you? Give it to Jesus and know that without doubt, he will resolve it. The greatest Christians learn this lesson. When you call the Lord to his office, he must respond. The trick is that you have to know what he promised. Go through Holy Scripture and find his promises to you and call him to them.

The key is simple. We even know where it is. The question is, "do you want to use it? Do you want to be a dog begging at the masters table, admitting that you are incapable of doing anything on your own? Do want to admit that you survive on the crumbs that fall or do you want to be the master of the feast? Do you want to be the one to decide whose hands are properly washed and whose are not? Or do you want to be the one to decide when the gifts of God should be received and by whom and under what circumstances? **Or** are you happy to be like that Syrophenician woman catching the crumbs that fall from the feast that Jesus is spreading. We are all dogs. You know, my dog never worries. She does not have stress related illnesses and she does not need therapy to resolve the pain she carries for she carries none. She gladly depends on me for every aspect of her life and just assumes that I will take care of whatever needs taking care of. Now, that's Georgie – my dog, but when you are a dog belonging to Jesus Christ, well, then just imagine how very little you need to worry. Just imagine how good it would be to be **his** dog. But he calls us his family, even his body. AMEN.