

CRUMBS OF LIFE
BLC – B. HULL SOMERS – 9.9.18

Isaiah 35:4-7a, James 2:1-10, 14-17, Mark 7:24-37

I am pretty sure that one of the worst things one can do in a marriage is eat the other person's leftovers. Seriously, it should be in the vows. For richer, for poorer, leaving your pad thai untouched, in sickness and in health.

I am not claiming that it is justified. I don't like it when it happens to me but that certainly does not make it appropriate. Why is it that when we have been nourished by a meal once, we insist on enjoying it a second time, like it is our right? Even to the point of keeping it from the person we have chosen to share our lives with?

After all, leftovers can be nourishing to someone else. The Syrophenician woman in our Gospel text knew that and she challenged the ownership of crumbs of the chosen people.

Our Scriptures this morning speak to a people with hearts paralyzed by fear of not having what they need. Some were people in exile wanting to hear words of hope into their fight or flight worlds. Others were folk who are tempted to cater to the rich and powerful in hopes of getting a boost in their status while ignoring the neediest amongst them. Some were blind and deaf to the word of God. Awaiting healing. And others were in opposition about whether or not those on the outside would get to eat even the crumbs from the table.

The Syrophenician woman's story is one of the more troubling snapshots of the life and ministry of Jesus. In it, we find Jesus who has been exhausted by ministry trying to hide out and get some rest but the people prove relentless. One in particular, a mom, looking for a cure for her demon-possessed daughter, would not leave him alone.

I do not blame this woman. I know that, as parents, we will do far more and pursue far more for our children than we ever would for ourselves. Having a child is like having your heart live outside of your body. It is terrifying seeing one's heart running around in the world without being able to always protect or control what happens to it. When our children are hurt, we hurt. When they suffer, we want to shoulder it for them. And, so often, we cannot.

This woman had been on a quest to get some relief for her daughter. In the first century there were all kinds of maladies that were bunched together and called demon possession. We do not know if the little girl had epilepsy or an actual demon. This mother had no doubt been to shamans and healers, doctors and charlatans, witches and rabbis...her daughter's health and future was so important to her.

That deep, deep need and love brought her to Jesus. Which is one of the most profound lessons of this Scripture. If we follow through our deepest needs, wounds and loves, it will lead us to Jesus.

Unfortunately, when she encountered Jesus, He was not having it. He, along with the rest of the crowd, recognized her as an outsider – someone who was impure, not a member of the faithful community, an enemy to Israel...not to mention the fact that her daughter had a demon which, in the first century, ensured her status as impure and sinful.

Scholars have different ideas about why Jesus responded to her with such harshness. Some say that he was exhibiting his fully human side, tired from his earthly ministry and allowing it to make him cranky. Others interpret it to be that he was using hyperbole – as he often did – to make a point to those within earshot about who is in and who is out in this Kingdom established and perfected in Christ. I prefer the latter, but either way we end up with

the same result. A stubborn momma whose deepest need brought her on her knees to Jesus and the healing she found there.

Jesus asked within earshot of those gathered why he should give to the dogs what was meant for the children. In the 1st century Jewish tradition the colloquial term for those who belong in the Jewish faith was children of Israel whereas “little dogs” was used for anyone else.

This is where the leftovers come in. That stubborn momma suggested that if she wasn't worthy to come to the table, she simply get whatever was leftover, because she believed that there was enough Jesus to go around.

This is the point in the Gospel where we go from reading along in peace and oblivion to suddenly in the crosshairs of conviction. If we are reading Scripture faithfully, this will happen a lot. We should not be able to read Scripture and come away unscathed. Perhaps that is why Paul likened it to a sword in the spiritual armor.

This Scripture cuts like a knife to our own tendencies of sin and scarcity. Do we believe that there is enough hope, enough healing, enough resources, enough forgiveness, enough grace, enough love to go around? Or do we hoard and fear and stay silent, quiet and unmoving in a feeling of scarcity?

Do we believe that anyone is worthy of forgiveness and love or do we think that there are children, like us who clean up nice and sit in the pews and kneel at the altar, and then there are the little dogs who do not.

Maybe we do not even turn our judgment outward, but instead we internalize it - do we trust that God could heal places in us that we have written off in our own lives and in our own bodies? Relationships that we deem to be irreparably broken? Prayers that have become so

rote that we know that we know that they will never be answered...secrets that have been held so long they have calcified like mummified walls, impeding our ability to connect with others, with the world, with ourselves.

Jesus came and lived in a body that could experience fear and hunger and the relief of getting dirty feet washed after walking miles in the desert. He showed us how to be human and then showed us how to face betrayal and even death with hope and compassion, and then rose the third day so that we could know that we know that there is not a thing in the universe that will separate us from God's love in Christ Jesus and that that hope is never lost.

Can we have the courage to follow our deepest pain and love and allow it to lead us to Jesus? To claim this inheritance, even if it is only crumbs...Poet Jan Richardson wrote a beautiful prayer from the perspective of the Syrophenician woman. It speaks to acknowledging our need and seeking Christ. It is entitled "Stubborn Blessing" and it reads, *"Don't tell me no. I have seen you feed the thousands, seen miracles spill from your hands like water, like wine, seen you with circles and circles of crowds pressed around you and not one soul turned away. Don't start with me.*

I am saying you can close the door, but I will keep knocking. You can go silent, but I will keep shouting. You can tighten the circle, but I will trace a bigger one around you, around the life of my child, who will tell you no one surpasses a mother for stubbornness. I am saying I know what you can do with crumbs and I am claiming mine, every morsel and scrap you have up your sleeve. Unclench your hand, your heart. Let the scraps fall like manna, like mercy for the life of my child, the life of the world. Don't you tell me no."

We barely deserve crumbs and yet Christ invites us to sit at the table in a full place of belonging and then to make sure that others know they are invited to the same. Receiving healing and wholeness to our brokenness as we follow it to the feet of Jesus. No leftovers required. Amen.

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