

Stretching Toward Sunday

Thoughts, readings and reflections based on this week's lectionary readings

August 17, 2014

Proper 15A/Ordinary 20A/Pentecost +10

The readings this week:

- Genesis 45:1-15 ◦ Psalm 133
- Romans 11:1-2a, 29-32 ◦ Matthew 15:(10-20), 21-28

[Click here to read this week's Scriptures](#)

Crumbs of Grace

She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." Matthew 15:27

If you're a pet owner, you probably know the routine. The table is set, the meal is spread, and all canine family members gather at your feet with sad eyes and hopeful bellies. If you so much as make eye contact the whines begin soon rising to a cacophony of lamenting yips and barks. The pups are persistent, coveting every bite you put into your mouth. Hey, who can blame them? Kibble or human fare—there is simply no contest. They will pretty much take any crumb you throw their way.

In the south, where I grew up, we have a delectable and not-so-good-for-your-cholesterol morsel known as the "hushpuppy." It's basically corn meal doctored up with onion and perhaps some spices that is shaped into a ball or fritter and deep fried. Usually served with fried fish and potato fries for an artery-clogging triple play, its humble origin is attributed to an attempt to quiet noisy pups—hence the name "hushpuppy." It also sounds a whole lot better than calling them "shut-up-dogs."

Perhaps this week's gospel lesson is a case of "heavenly hushpuppies." A despised outsider, the Canaanite woman, challenges the polite religious order and begs for a few crumbs of grace from Jesus. The disciples, the insiders, urge Jesus to send her away. Is her dogged advocacy on behalf of her demon-possessed daughter embarrassing to them, are her cries just too annoying, or is it simply that she does not belong at their table that irks them?

It's always useful to look at context. This story is sandwiched in between two feeding stories—the 5,000 and the 4,000. Immediately preceding the woman's entrance is Jesus' teaching about clean and unclean, what defiles a person comes from within not without. A look at this bigger picture should alert us to something important happening here.

Is it about faith? Is it about inclusion and exclusion? Is it about grace? Is it about healing and wholeness? Is it about persistence? Is it about our own condition before

our Lord? In a word, "yes." The point of the story is about all of these things.

Martin Luther is supposed to have said "We are beggars: this is true" as his last words. How true indeed! We are all of us the Canaanite woman begging for crumbs of grace, barking for heavenly hushpuppies. I would be willing to bet that most of us know what it feels like to be on the outside looking in, to not belong, and not be invited to the table.

We are also the insiders. Like the disciples we try to follow Jesus. We know the "rules" and "traditions" and how things work in our comfortable, familiar contexts. We are sometimes annoyed when our orderly way of doing things is disrupted. How many young parents, for example, have felt like outsiders when glares and grimaces have been shot in the direction of their squirming, noisy toddlers? How many guests have been confused by worship order or communion practice? How do we respond to the parishioner who "drives us crazy"?

We are simultaneously saint and sinner, fallen and redeemed, deeply flawed and fully loved. By crumbs of grace from God's own son, we have been saved. My prayer is that we are never too sure of ourselves, too proud and comfortable, to forget what it is like to be that outsider begging at the feet of Jesus. If a crumb of grace was enough to work a miracle for us, shouldn't we be whipping up a batch of heavenly hushpuppies and setting an extra place at the table for all would come in?

Sharon Blezard,
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All are welcome.
All.



Reflecting on the Word



1st Reading: [Genesis 45:1-15](#)

How does Joseph explain to his brothers the reason for his being sold into Egypt and the purpose of his sufferings? Think of a difficult situation you are currently facing. How can you entrust it to God Almighty, the one for whom nothing is impossible? Restoring a relationship fractured by injustice and injury requires repentance, confession and acceptance of responsibility for the consequences. In what way have you, like Joseph's brothers, been involved in such a process? How can this perspective toward your own suffering make it possible for you to forgive someone who has grievously wronged or hurt you? [Quiet Time Bible Study, InterVarsity Press](#)

Psalm Reading: [Psalm 133](#)

How does the "mystic sweet communion" enjoyed by God's people compare to the kinds of unity that you have witnessed or experienced firsthand with others? Mount Hermon rises 9,000 feet at three snow-covered peaks, its many glaciers stretching across 20 miles in northern Israel, watering the Jordan River valleys and cities below. However, during the summer, its snow and glaciers produce a heavy dew that envelops Mount Hermon, leaving much of the surroundings arid. For the "dew of Hermon" to fall on Mount Zion would be most unusual. What does that say about the blessing of brotherly unity? Where are you experiencing strong brother-to-brother or sister-to-sister bonds and blessings that sanctify and sustain God's people, as does "oil" and "dew"? [Quiet Time Bible Study, InterVarsity Press](#)

Behold! How good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity. Psalm 133:1

Praying Toward Sunday

The Canaanite Woman...

*She asked, he answered
but in the comma lies a story
persistence, yes humility, also
openness of heart and mind
hallmarks of real change
she asks, our answer
lies in the comma.*

3rd Reading: [Romans 11:1-2a, 29-32](#)

We all have expectations of how God will work in our lives that come out of our desires rather than God's. In what way do you feel that God has failed to follow your plan? What issue does Paul discuss in these verses? Read 11:11-12 and 11:25-27. What is the relationship between Jew and Gentile that Paul lays out here? In verses 29-32, to whom does "you" refer? To whom does "they" refer? What puts Jew and Gentile on equal footing before God? What is the Good News in verse 32? How does this good news reflect God's plan for our lives? [Light on the Lessons, LBM](#)

4th Reading: [Matthew 15:\(10-20\), 21-28](#)

When you first recognized who Jesus is and what he offers to you, what were your thoughts and feelings? What ancient pagan people is this woman associated with? (See [Deuteronomy 7:1-6](#); [20:16-18](#).) With what two titles does the Canaanite woman address Jesus? What is the significance of these titles? Jesus responds to the woman four times, the third time it appears that Jesus has just added insult to injury! Most people would have given up at this point and gone away in frustration. What would *you* have done if someone called you a dog? How does the woman respond to Jesus' formulation of a witty Jewish put-down? What is Jesus' fourth and final response to the Canaanite woman? What can her persistence and faith teach us? [Grace Communion International](#)

*Broken hearts
scattered
yet never lost.*

*Voices calling
from deep beyond
inviting wholeness.*

*Tears molding pieces
together again.*

*Hearts for God.
Hearts of God.*

