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**“Bull Dog Faith”**

God’s PEACE is ALWAYS YOURS in Jesus.

Hear the Word of God from Matthew 15,

He said to her, “It’s not right to take the children’s bread, and toss it to their dogs.’

‘Yes, Lord,’ she said, ‘but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.’

Then Jesus answered, ‘Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted!’ And her daughter was healed from that very hour.’

DEAR FRIENDS IN CHRIST,

She was desperate, verging on panic. You could see it in her eyes. You could hear it in her voice. Her little girl was demon possessed. And this woman would not take “NO” for an answer. No matter what Jesus said, she kept coming back to Jesus, like a bulldog. What’s even more amazing - this woman was a Canaanite, an outsider to God’s people. But that's what this Gospel is all about this morning - God's universal grace to all in Jesus, and the faith of a bulldog that won't let go, no matter what.

Jesus was taking some time off on the north coast, the region of Tyre and Sidon. Gentile country. A woman from the region approached Jesus. That's two strikes against her already. A woman didn't approach a man in public. And a Canaanite wouldn't dare approach a Jew without causing an incident. Think of Palestinians and Jews today, and then multiply it. This woman's little girl is demon-possessed, and Jesus is her last and only hope.

**"Son of David, have mercy on me!"** She's trying to pass herself off as an Israelite, by using the term: "Son of David", because "Son of David" is the Israelite term for the Messiah. Maybe Jesus won't notice my accent or facial features. Maybe I can trick Jesus into healing my daughter.

But Jesus says nothing. Stone, dead silence. He will not be tricked or manipulated. He's not a vending machine where you plug in the nickels and dimes of just the right phrases, and out pops your blessing on demand.

The disciples think they have Jesus all figured out, so they jump on the bandwagon. "She's a pain. She's following us everywhere. Tell her to beat it." Sound familiar? The disciples...the 'insiders'...our sin...is often quick to exclude the outsiders! To them, this woman was an outsider. Why Jesus didn't come to save everyone. He came to love the 'insiders', to save the salvageable, to redeem the redeemable. So we like to think! It had been drilled into the disciples' heads from childhood. Canaanites were the descendants of Canaan, the cursed grandson of Noah. "Don't go near those people. Don't talk with them. Don't eat with them. Don't touch them. And don't you dare marry one of them!"

On the one hand, Jesus ignores the disciples' suggestion, to 'get rid of her'. On the other hand, He sees through the woman's pious words. You can't "pull the wool" over the Good Shepherd's eyes. So Jesus says to her: **"I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel."** He reminds her of who she is, because she's trying to approach him as someone she's not. The way to Jesus is not 'pious phrases', like the woman tried, but it's honest 'confession of sins', and drop dead faith in Jesus. She was not being honest trying to pretend to be an Israelite. She needed honest confession. I am a sinner, Jesus; but I need you. That's what Jesus is looking for! **Page 2**

So she cries out again, this time begging on her knees: “**Lord, help me!**” Notice, this time there's no more "Son of David" smooth-talking. But also notice, this woman is not letting go of Jesus. Now it's the prayer of a desperate beggar – “**Lord, help me!**”

This time Jesus says, “**But it's not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs.**” I realize you may think that Jesus is being crude, mean, and arrogant, but if you just hang on to the end of this, you will see, that Jesus is doing what He’s doing to call forth a ‘deep’ faith in this woman. Yes, He calls her a "dog" – in the Greek a "little dog" but still a dog. Dogs were considered dirty. Not pampered pets; but garbage-eating scavengers. "Dog" is what Israelites called Canaanites. It was an ethnic slur. Perhaps you know a few yourself. You may think that Jesus is cold and uncaring. The news media today would say He was a racist. But there’s times you just have to trust that Jesus knows what He’s doing. Jesus says, “**But it's not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs.**”

Still she refuses to go away. And she doesn't stop praying. In fact, she agrees with Jesus. “**Yes, Lord. That's right. Dogs don't deserve the bread of the table, but they do get to lick up the crumbs that fall from their master's table.**” She's got Him in His sweet spot, because she is confessing her faith in Him as a Savior who is gracious to those who don’t deserve it; and she's not about to let Him go.

That's faith, folks, from a Canaanite! An outsider. A non-Israelite. And it isn't just some puppy dog faith. This is a bull-dog faith; that locks its jaws on Jesus' words, and won't let Him go. She doesn’t let her sinful pride get in the way of receiving Jesus’ gifts. ‘You call me a dog! I accept the title. I am a dog, because of my sins.’ We all are! “But even the dogs get to lick up the crumbs that fall from their master’s table. And even the crumbs of your love and grace for me, are all I need.” She clings to Jesus with bull-dog faith, because in her faith she is convinced that Jesus is “**man’s best friend**”, and that His mercy is big enough to embrace a dog like her.

Earlier, you may have felt that Jesus was crude and condescending, by the way He spoke to her. But it's only when you see the ugliness of your sins, that you can truly see the sweetness of the Gospel. And if you try to diminish the ugliness of your sin (well, I'm not that bad); you actually diminish the sweetness of the Gospel. Yes, you and I are sinful dogs too; and yet, even the crumbs of Jesus' grace, that fall from His table – this bread is my body broken for you – forgive us everything!

Jesus did what He did, and said what He said, to work in her a “bull-dog faith, that locks its jaws on Jesus' grace, and won't let Him go.” And now that He's pulled her through, He says, "**Woman, great is your faith.**” Faith that doggedly clings to Jesus, even when He appears to say ‘no’ to our cries. Faith that hears a “yes”, buried deep inside the Lord's “no.” Faith that clings to Jesus even when Jesus seems to have turned His back on you. Faith that clings to Jesus even when He looks you in the eye and says, “I haven't come for you.” Faith that says, ‘Oh, yes you have.’ Jesus wants you to take Him at His Word in your life, with this kind of a ‘bull-dog’ faith. And Jesus will not disappoint. He says to her, "**Let it be done for you, as you have asked**”. And we're told that the moment He spoke those words, the demons left her little daughter. Just a word from Jesus, and the demons flee. That's the kind of Savior we've got – One who dances all over the devil, and sets us free!

Every Sunday the divine service puts us back in the doghouse. ‘**I, a poor, miserable sinner.**” The Law declares us all ‘dirty dogs’, and sweeps away every attempt to butter up God with our phony flattery. God's Word lays it on the line, and tells us that we're as good as dead dogs without Jesus. But Jesus reminds you, what He never wants you to forget, that “**even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from the Master's table,**” and those crumbs turn out to be richest of fare. "**Take, eat, this is my Body given for you. Take, drink, this is my Blood shed for your forgiveness.**” This is the Jesus who went to the dogs, in His death, on that garbage dump, called Calvary; where your sins and mine were dealt with, once and for all. But us dogs never had it so good, as when we're under this Master's table! For even the crumbs of Jesus' grace, makes dirty dogs, to be children of the heavenly father; and by His grace we're no longer under the table, but given a seat at the Master's table, at the marriage feast of the lamb, in His kingdom which has no end! Scripture calls it “grace”, but dogs call it “life”. AMEN!