



## Pastor Gwen's Message We are Beggars

Sunday August 16, 2020

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. **AMEN**

In Proverbs it says, "A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity." Two brothers had been fighting vigorously for a long time; so long it actually turned into a feud. It is said that Martin Luther helped settle the fight between these brothers as his last act right before he died. As his wife was going through his pockets after he died, she found a scrap of paper that read, "This is true. We are beggars."

Martin Luther is credited with saying and writing many profound things in his life. It is interesting that he should write, "We are beggars" as one of his last thoughts while on this earth. In itself it is a quite profound statement as well. Luther had trouble living with the fact that no matter what he did, he could not be right before God on his own. He came to realize that there was nothing he could say or do to make God love him. It was by God's grace alone that he would be saved. So Luther came to realize that we are truly all beggars before God.

Our Gospel text today begins with Jesus talking to the crowd about dietary issues. The Pharisees and scribes have been rebuking Jesus about not keeping the law and so He goes on to make another point that seems to debunk the Jew dietary laws. Jesus claims, "it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but it is what comes out of that mouth that defiles." In other words it is not necessarily important that all Israelites keep strict rules about unclean foods because they end up in the sewer anyway. This whole idea rattles the Pharisees as it goes right to one of the key elements of Jewish identity. So Jesus' claim is that what enters the mouth has nothing to do with what come from the heart. This turns Jewish law upside down and is quite

radical. And so the Pharisees are offended as they have spent their lives not only being the religious police, but by believing that eating the right foods will make you holy before God. It is not what you eat that is important but where your heart is that will ultimately make you right before God. This paradigm shift by Jesus really sets the Pharisees in opposition.

And so Jesus needs a break from this defiling discussion. He actually left that place and went away to Tyre and Sidon. Now that is a long walk some 25 and 50 miles from the Sea of Galilee. We don't know why Jesus goes there but we do know that it is the only time in Matthew's Gospel account that he does go there. It is outside of the Jewish territory. Possibly, God led Him there to encounter this Canaanite woman, who knows? Or maybe since He had rattled the feathers of the Pharisees, He thought it best to lay low for a while.

Well, this Canaanite woman comes and confronts Jesus by shouting at him. As an aside, Canaanites were the original inhabitants of the Promised Land, but were displaced when the Israelites entered. They then became the outsiders, enemies of Israel, as they were idolatrous. They did not believe in God nor follow the laws set forth in the Pentateuch.

However, this woman, who remains nameless, is rather unique. She calls Jesus, "Lord" which would acknowledge his Divinity and then throws in "Son of David". Wow, this remark shows that she believes that He is the long-awaited Messiah. It is pretty unlikely that a Canaanite woman would say such things. And then the begging begins. She asks for mercy for her daughter that is tormented by a demon. And what does Jesus do? Nothing.

Here is this woman begging for help for her daughter and Jesus is silent. We have no way to know why Jesus did not answer right away. Was he thinking of how to handle this situation? Maybe because his focus was on saving the whole nation of Israel, He felt he did not have time to deal with the Canaanite woman. Even the disciples chime in and tell Jesus to send her away.

Now, I don't know about you, but if I were in this mom's situation, I would be a beggar as well. Her daughter is afflicted by a demon. It is a helpless and hopeless situation that no medicine can cure. If it were me, I would do anything to help my child. And believe me I know the feeling well. Rodney and I always said that the emergency room in our old hometown should be named the Leigh Downing ER as we had spent many thousands of dollars not to mention hours there with our hazard Hal daughter. But luckily we were able to get help for whatever ailment she was in for each time. But this mom

in our story has no other options. She confronts Jesus. And He does not respond.

So how would that make you feel? He was your last hope for your pride and joy daughter and He does not even acknowledge your plight. I think I would be pretty put off. And like this mom, I think I would probably make a scene. And so, she does, by following Jesus and begging over and over for His help.

Jesus answer to this begging is “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel”. Sure, sounds like Jesus is saying “No” to her, as His mission was to save God’s covenant people, the Israelites. WOW. Rather crushing words to someone who is looking to Jesus as the last hope for her daughter.

But she persists. She comes to Jesus now that she has his attention and kneels before Him. What faith that must of taken, because to kneel before someone was actually an act of worship. She comes begging that He help her daughter. She does not bribe Him or try to bargain with Jesus.

And so Jesus says that, “it is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs.” What the heck kind of answer is that for this poor and desperate woman? Another NO. Well, she does not give up but rather comes back with a snippet of her own, “Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master’s table.” She won’t give up. She does not argue but she is firm in her belief that Jesus’ mission is to save Israel’s lost sheet. Her dog comment also is a comment on God’s abundance. Food is there even for the dogs, those who are less than important in the scheme of things.

In the commentaries I read this week, dogs as the word was translated from the Greek, meant household pet. And we all know about household pets. They are not outsiders but rather considered part of the family. At our house Gunny waits patiently or should I say truthfully, not so patiently for us to finish our meal so he can at least lick the plates. He is a part of our family. Gunny does enjoy privileges at our feet. And he does eat the crumbs that Rodney lets fall from our table. Using these words the woman is putting faith in Jesus to the forefront. Her comment was powerful, as she claims her own place even if it is under the family’s dinner table.

I think this woman truly believes that Jesus will and should heal her daughter. She has faith in His ability, in His divinity to do just that. And in the end I think that Jesus finds this faith filled woman a joy! She has faith that is unshakeable and put Jesus in a place where he welcomes the opportunity to heal her

daughter. And he does just that! He also, praises the woman as He recognizes her great faith. I think Jesus also recognizes how remarkable she is. She never gave up. She was persistent despite constant rejection. She clung to the fact that God was a merciful God. And she was humble. She had nothing to offer. She had nothing and yes, she was a beggar in every way.

And so you say, what does this have to do with us. Are we beggars before God? Do we live by that same mantra that Luther scribbled on the piece of paper in his pocket? I know that I do.

For we have nothing to offer God. Some try with soon to be broken promises of, "If God you do this, then I will come to church every Sunday." Or how about the "If you do this, I will never do it again." Such requests for help from the Almighty are lame. We have nothing to offer our Lord and Savior. Except to believe.

Or how about the times when things get rough we blame God and loose faith? We cry out that He does not love us anymore or He wouldn't so and so. How human of us. We look to the world for answers, for comfort and there is nothing there that can satisfy us for the long term. No one to love us the way God can. Nothing that will take away the pain of the situation.

So not only do we have nothing to give God as it all belongs to Him in the first place, but we turn away from the only one that can help us in times of great despair.

So, what do we do? In our sin and brokenness, we come to God, helpless beggars. We need what He has to offer. Our God is a good and merciful God to all of His children. God has clothed us in His grace and mercy. At our baptism, we were claimed as His children and born of the Holy Spirit. And as a child of God we will always have a seat at the table, not under the table, but at the table of the Lord. We are fed with His body and blood, where our sins are forgiven. We are the lost sheep of Israel, the beggars that He will care for in this life and beyond.

Jesus died for us on the cross, what greater love could anyone show for another, even those full of sin. So we don't need to bring anything to the table, it is already prepared for us, because of what Jesus did in His life, death and resurrection. God hears our prayers and knows what we need before we even ask. And He will always answer our prayers. Sometime yes, sometimes with a No and sometimes with a not yet. God knows what is best for us. He knows

his children and all our trial and troubles. He also knows we come to him as faithful beggars. We have such a loving God who accepts us, begging and all. As Luther would say, "This is most certainly true". **AMEN**