

A Desperate Mother

Mark 7:24-30

Our gospel reading this morning is about a child who needed her mother desperately. It is not only telling us that the mother was desperately seeking help for her daughter but shows that the mother can do everything within her power to help her daughter in any given situation. This is what Sophia Loren said one time that “When you are a mother, you are never really alone in your thoughts. A mother always has to think twice, once for herself and once for her child.”

Mark is telling us that Jesus did not go to Tyre to administer to the people but to get away from the crowd of people following him. He did that several times in his career to spend quiet time with the disciples teaching them the things about God.

But when the Gentile Syro-Phoenician woman heard about Jesus, she went to him and begged Jesus to cast the demon out of her daughter. Then Jesus said to her: “Let the children be fed first,” “for it is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs.” Was this considered a kind response from Christ? Evidently Jesus’ long range mission is to go the Jews first and then later to the Greeks or gentiles. So Jesus is not so much saying no to the woman as he is saying, but he is saying “First things first; one thing at a time.” But does he have to use such remarks and call the woman a dog?

But in any case, this woman did not back down. She said, Lord, “but even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.” Lord, I fully understand my position. And I know the type of world that I am living in. I can take whatever you can give me. Just let my daughter get well. Then Jesus said to her, you may go and the demon has left your daughter.”

When the rebels invaded the capital city of Sierra Leone, Freetown during the war, my mother told me how she ran into the bush with a lady that had a four year old baby girl. They were in the bush hiding from the gun sounds and the rebels for more than three days without food. They finally came to a village and saw a woman cooking bulgur wheat. My mother had money tied around her waist and she offered the woman who was cooking the bulgur wheat one hundred dollars bill for a plate of bulgur wheat to feed the baby. She was told by this woman that the food was not enough for her own children to feed others. My mother was grieved and pleaded with this woman to feed just the little baby. She finally agreed to take the money and shared the bulgur wheat with the four year old baby.

This Gentile woman is concerned about her little girl. Some of you or even a number of you can relate in a remarkable way to what this Syro-Phoenician woman is going through. You've been there. You've had those days and nights in which you could not sleep, nights in hospital, nights contemplating yet another surgery, nights in which you didn't know which way to turn, nights filled with worry—worry over what may happen. You’re concerned about your children — your children who are unwell, your children who are not performing as they should be.

This woman was in the wrong side of the territory. Jesus was in the land of the Jews and this woman approached him. Not only that, you see, but she is also a Gentile. Do you know what the Jews called Gentiles? The text tells us. “Dogs.” She has all kinds of obstacles. There's an issue of

race: she is a Syro-Phoenician. She is not “one of us.” She is an outsider. She lives in a foreign part. She is an enemy. And she is a woman. Yes. This is not 2016, now, folks. This is the first century. She was a foreigner and she was a woman — and a noisy one, at that.

She comes with this extraordinary burden, this heart-rending burden for her daughter: “Have mercy on me,” she says to Jesus. And He ignores her. He says not a word. This is Jesus we are talking about here, and the disciples said to send her away.” Lord, send her away!” (Meaning, “She is not one of us.”) And then Jesus says, “I was sent for the lost sheep of the tribe of Israel.” Now that is true, of course. He had come for the Jews; He had come for His people. She falls down upon her knees, and she says to Jesus, “Lord, help me.” I fully understand my position. I can take whatever you can give me. Just let my daughter get well.

This Gentile woman taught Jesus something. She was able to open Jesus’ eyes to a reality he had not expected. God’s love overflows further than ever asked or imagined. When God provides, there is always more than enough. Even though Jesus did not see that at first, but the woman did not take no for an answer.

There should be another way to read ourselves into this story by putting us into the woman’s shoes. She is a concerned desperate woman. She had to come to a place she was not wanted. She tried everything for her daughter before and now maybe this Jesus guy can do something for her daughter. This woman was seeking relief. Her daughter was ill and she was willing to do anything to save her baby. How could she get Jesus to see things differently?

Jesus saw the humility in this woman’s faith. She did not come to Jesus with arrogance. Jesus had first refused to see her. He even called her people “dogs” in a way that was very offensive. She was willing to accept her position and title placed upon her by Jesus, Syro-Phoenician woman! She was not offended by it but instead she use her humility and patient to confront Jesus. She stood up to Jesus in a well convincing way, and Jesus was silenced. She humbled herself in order to receive a blessing from Jesus. Jesus saw that she has active faith. She put her faith into action. Let us learn from this humble woman the blessedness of being humble before our Lord.

True biblical faith and humility can lead us to action. I feel that humility and faith are more than just believing in God and reflecting upon His word. Humility is living out our vocation and acting on our value and purpose in this world as Christians. You can defuse arguments when you are humble. All you need is a gentle answer to turn away wrath unlike a harsh word stirs up anger. As the Syro-Phoenician woman did, you can handle unfair treatment peacefully when you are humble. She did not yell when she pleaded her case for mercy. My mother showed grief and mercy which made her to get the lady cooking the bulgur changed her mind and was able to feed the starving baby. You can ask for forgiveness when you are humble. If mountains will not move, be willing to climb the mountains. If waters will not part, be willing to forge the stormy sea. There is enough grace for all of us.

Through faith and humility, we can receive from the Lord’s Table more than just crumbs. This lady received part of the bigger loaf of bread. God always have blessing waiting for us. He has a place for all of us but we have to put our faith in action. Act with prayer. Act with worship. Act with faith. And let Jesus work a miracle in your life.