



DEXTER UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

7643 Huron River Drive

Dexter, MI 48130

734-426-8480

WHERE IS JESUS WHEN I NEED HIM?

~ Scripture: Matthew 15:21-28 ~

November 26, 2006

Rev. Stephen G. Bringardner

VIDEO CLIP FROM SERMONSPICE: ***“A THANKSGIVING PRAYER”***

Those were four very moving Thanksgiving prayers, weren't they? Poignant and touching because they show people giving humble thanks no matter what the circumstances.

I hope each of you had a wonderful THANKSGIVING this past week—and were able to offer your own prayer of thanksgiving to a gracious and loving God.

Perhaps you found yourself identifying with one or more of the people in the video clip. Perhaps you're in a situation this morning that defies thanksgiving. . .that has you crying out to God. And you've not gotten a response yet. . .at least not one that's satisfactory.

Sometimes the silence of God in the face of need is deafening. It throws us off. There are times when God seems not to speak or respond—at least not how you think He should. . .or when. Seems like a gentle knock on the door ought to be enough. Yet after you've nearly beaten the door down, you start to wonder: *“Where is God? Does He even care?”*

“Where is Jesus when I need him?”

SCRIPTURE

There's an incident recorded in **Matthew's Gospel, chapter 15, verses 21-28** in which Jesus seemingly ignores a woman also in desperate need. He even appears to put her down. Yet in the end she is blessed beyond measure. Let's look at it this morning and see what it has to teach us:

²¹Leaving that place, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. ²²A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is suffering terribly from demon-possession." ²³Jesus did not answer a word. So his disciples came to him and urged him, "Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us." ²⁴He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel." ²⁵The woman came and knelt before him. "Lord, help me!" she said. ²⁶He replied, "It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs." ²⁷"Yes, Lord," she said, "but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." ²⁸Then Jesus answered, "You have great faith! Your request is granted." And her daughter was healed from that very hour.

It says in v. 21: *“Leaving that place”* Leaving what place? Where was Jesus?

He had been preaching in *Capernaum* in *Galilee* (a largely Jewish area). Then he heads north to *Phoenicia* (a Gentile area) and preaches in *Tyre & Sidon* (two large cities). On his return trip, he travels through the region of *The Decapolis* (“ten cities”) where he feeds the 4000. . .then crosses to *Magadan*. . .thus completing a circle. [cf. Life Application Study Bible, p. 1565]

Phoenicia would be modern-day Lebanon. The Canaanites dwelt there. You might recall that they were the original inhabitants of Palestine in Moses' time—vicious opponents who resisted the Israelites settling the Promised Land. They ended up moving north and founding this nation. They were and still are the enemies

of Israel.

The Canaanite Woman had evidently heard of Jesus. When she came to him, she addressed him “*Lord, Son of David*”. She was acknowledging him as the Messiah—as the One sent by God to preach to the poor, heal the sick, and redeem sinners.

There’s a strange IRONY here. The Jews were the people to whom God had promised the Messiah; He wanted to use them to spread the message of salvation to the rest of the world. They were the “children” who had a special spot at the Father’s table. But the blessing ended up going to the Gentiles (i.e.: the dogs under the table).

[We’ll get to that reference in a minute; it sounds worse than it really is.]

God’s blessings are intended for all people—Jews & Gentiles alike—that’s why Jesus didn’t just minister in regions where Jewish people were dominant. He ventured into regions like this; regions that could be considered not only Gentile territory but hostile, enemy territory. It reminds us that the Gospel is for the whole world, not just those who are just like us (e.g.: in thought, in cultural or national heritage). Didn’t Jesus commission us to “*go into all the world and preach the Good News to all creation*” [Mark 16:15]?

Jesus was modeling that. That’s why He was in Phoenicia.

But look how he makes his point. This Gentile woman comes to him. She has a daughter who is cruelly tormented with an evil spirit. A rather disturbing sequence follows.

1. **Jesus totally ignores her.** v. 23 tells us Jesus didn’t even give her the courtesy of a reply. NOTHING! No “*I care*”. No “*Yes, I’ll heal her*”. Not even “*No, I won’t!*” Jesus says nothing!

Just because you ask doesn’t mean God will immediately jump to your bidding. He may not come when you want Him to. . .or in the way you want Him to. But, He will never let you down. He will never fail you. Somehow, some way he’s always on time. [Don’t ask me to explain that; I just know it to be true.]

So Jesus ignores this woman. But look! She keeps on pressing. So much so, that now the Disciples ask the Lord to send her away for all her pleading. She was beginning to get on their nerves. What does Jesus do?

2. **Jesus turns to her and says something, but what he says seems like a refusal.** He says in v. 24 that He was sent to minister to the Lost Sheep of Israel—not the Gentiles. “*Well, that leaves me out.*” Another snub. Another rebuff. Is he saying: “*You don’t qualify! You’re the wrong color. You were brought up on the wrong side of the tracks.*” Seems pretty insensitive.

What does she do? She gets down on her knees and begins to worship him. . .calls him “*Lord*” (v. 25). That’s pretty radical. I don’t think I would have reacted that way.

It doesn’t end there. It gets worse. . .

3. **Jesus insults her (v. 26: calls her a “dog”).** There’s no way of getting around that. However, here’s where it helps to know the Greek. There are two words for “dog”:

- ONE refers to wild, untamed scavenger dogs roaming around outdoors. They’re kinda dangerous. . .and you want to avoid them. In Scripture, evil kings, false prophets, and the like were called “dogs” using this word because they were contemptible, dangerous, to be avoided at all costs. A real term of degradation and reproach.
- ANOTHER word refers to a house pet (literally “little dog”). The kind many of us have that come begging at our tables when we sit down to eat.

There’s a lot of theology in that statement that I’m not sure the woman understood. Basically, Jesus was saying that his first priority was to provide food for the children and not allow the pets under the table to

interrupt. The children of God have always been the people of Israel.

At the same time, he was needling the DISCIPLES with a little sarcasm because they were being too hard on this woman: *“Look guys, even the pets in the family are entitled to a few scraps.”*

But the WOMAN! The woman! All this was over her head. How did it hit her?

I can't help but think that she could tell from the tone in Jesus' voice and perhaps the twinkle in his eyes that this was no insult. Her thought process may have run something like this. . .

Hmm, let's see: *“Family gathered at mealtime. . . food prepared by the Head of the family. . . family pet catching crumbs under the table. Looks like I'm the family dog in this scenario, not one of the 'children'.”* At that point she could have gotten offended and said that's not good enough for me. I deserve more. I want a better spot at the family table. Instead: *“Hey, I'm cool with this. This is good enough for me. You can consider me an “interruption” at your table as long as I can receive your touch for my daughter. All I want is your blessing.”* After all, this was a MOTHER looking out after her child.

You've got to admire this woman's tenacity:

- She was willing to go beyond her comfort zone and massive cultural barriers.
- She came in humbleness and humility, not comparing herself to the others around the table. It took the hard edge out of her request—so that it didn't come across as a demand. It was a simple but genuine plea for God's mercy.

We always get in trouble when we draw comparisons between ourselves and others—especially when it appears God is blessing them more than us. God has promised to give grace to the humble, so: *“Humble yourselves under the mighty power (hand) of God, that he may lift you up in due time”* [I Peter 5:6].

- She pressed on. . . she persevered. How many of us know that perseverance pays off? By the time we get to v. 27 in the text, she's been ignored, turned down by Jesus, put down by the disciples, and called a dog. She simply says: *“So? Even the dogs are allowed to eat the scraps that fall beneath their master's table.”* That's what made this woman's blessing so great. It's what will make God's blessings in our lives great!

APPLICATION

Now if you're in a situation today and you feel like God is not answering, like it's not going to work out—keep on pressing! Keep on pressing! Don't give up. Don't get fickle and start vacillating between belief & unbelief. Hang in there. Keep on keeping on.

That's what the woman in the story did. She pressed on. She didn't give up. She didn't throw in the towel. She got to the point of saying: *“I don't need a full course meal. I don't need steak. I don't need fine wine. Could you please just give me a bread crumb? Just a bread crumb, that's all. Any way you bless me Lord, I will be satisfied.”*

Do you know, a few crumbs from the Master intended for the dog amount to far, far more than all this world has to offer?!

If you thank God today for the crumb blessings in your life. . .if you lift praise to His name. . .if you take the crumbs from His table and know that somehow they will be more than enough to get you through—then you will leave here today truly blessed!

Thank Him this morning for what you have. . .for what didn't happen as well as for what did happen. . .for how He knows what you need before you even ask. . .and that He will always supply your needs. Can you say today: “Any way you want to bless me Lord, I will be satisfied?”

AMEN! AMEN! I pray you have been helped. You'll never know how much I needed this sermon this morning.