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Pentecost 11

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

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“When a Crumb Is Not Just a Crumb”

Text: Matthew 15:21-28

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Well, it's been an interesting few weeks, hasn't it? From the high of George's ordination and the joy of his wedding, to the depth of losing our friend Tony. From worshipping in our own church (even when decorated like outer space for the Adventist's VBS) and at Immanuel, to now a temporary space here in a home. We've had five different preachers these last five weeks, from a learned professor to a retired pastor to a newly minted pastor, from a missionary to a seminarian. A tree came crashing down and death came crashing down, too. Quite the roller coaster.

But really, that's nothing new, is it? We, as a church, have been there before. So have you, as a Christian. High one day and low the next. Joyous one day and sorrowing the next. Triumphs and successes are followed by challenges, trials, and struggles. At home, at school, at work, sin and death come crashing down. Life like a roller coaster, or maybe a constant struggle.

But while things in our lives and in our church change, one thing never does - and that is our Saviour and His promises. Whether we are high and joyous or sad and sorrowful, He comes with the goods, His gifts, for us. Whether we are in a beautiful church or a temporary set up, He is present just the same. For wherever His Word is proclaimed and His Sacraments given, there is He. You can count on that. In the midst of a world where there maybe isn't a lot to count on, you can count on that. On Him.

Though there are times when maybe it seems different. Like maybe Jesus doesn't really want to help. Like He doesn't hear. Like the story we heard today of the Canaanite woman who came to Him for help. Her world was crashing down on her. Her daughter was *grievously demonized*. She probably would have gladly let the demon have her if it meant her daughter being set free. But there was nothing she could do. She was helpless . . . but not hopeless. For she came to the hope of the world, the *Lord* of heaven and earth, the promised *Son of David*, and would not let go. She could do nothing, but He could do everything.

But at first He doesn't respond. Not a word came from His mouth. No word of either healing or rebuke. He had heard her? She keeps crying out. For how long we don't know,

but long enough for the disciples to lose patience with her and beg Him to send her away. He doesn't, but does state that He *was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel*.

She is undeterred. Like Jacob who wrestled with God, she would not let Him go until He blessed her.

Interestingly, it is at this point that she is bold to *approach* Jesus. His words do not drive her away, but draw her in. Where maybe we hear rebuke, she hears invitation. Sheep know their shepherd's voice. So she approaches Him. *She comes and kneels before Him, saying, "Lord, help me."* Was it a desperate cry? Or just a whisper?

*It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs.* His first words spoken to her. Words that perhaps sound insulting to us, but words that this remarkable woman finds hope in. She is not proud. Yes, she is a dog. She'll gladly be a dog in Jesus' house! For *even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table*. A crumb is all she needs. For a crumb from Jesus is more than all the wealth of the world. A crumb from Jesus is greater than the grievous demon that is possessing her daughter. Just a crumb from Jesus . . .

Just two weeks ago we heard about other bread from Jesus, the Feeding of the 5,000. With just five loaves of bread and two fish, Jesus feeds the 5,000 men plus the women and children who were there with them, with 12 basketfuls left over. A crumb from Jesus is never just a crumb . . .

When I was in Kenya a number of years ago I was privileged to help with the distribution of the Lord's Supper at Nyapolo Lutheran Church. The church was overflowing that day and like we sometimes have to do here, we had to break the hosts to have enough for everyone. But then we also had to break the halves, and then break the quarters, and then the eighths, and by the time we were finished, I was placing crumbs into the mouths of those sheep come to feed on their Good Shepherd. Yet as they knew, a crumb from Jesus is never just a crumb . . .

Perhaps the events of the past few weeks have made us realize once again how much WE need crumbs. It's easy to forget. To get busy and forget. To have things going well and forget. To get lost in our pursuits and forget. To focus on what we want and desire and forget. To look to ourselves and forget. But then when trees and death or sorrow or trouble come crashing down on us, we realize that now as well as then and really at all times, we are the Canaanite woman. Or her daughter. WE are *grievously demonized* with temptations to sin, doubt, or despair; with temptations to pride, self-sufficiency, or over-confidence; with temptations to send those in need away, like the disciples. To forget that we - all of us! - are beggars in need of crumbs . . .

Beggars. We see them - *them*, right? - on the side of the road by red lights. We see *them*

in the Metro stations. We see *them* - that's not *us*, right? But it is us. Luther knew it. When he died, that was on the note in his pocket: *We are beggars, this is true. Lord, help me!* the woman cried out. Us, too. We need crumbs . . .

But a crumb from Jesus is not just a crumb; it's never just a crumb, but a feast! Perhaps one way to think about that is like the allowance a parent gives a child. A dollar or two from a parent is a crumb, but to the child, it's a feast. Or for someone who's lonely, a few crumbs of your time are like a feast to them. Or for someone in need, a few crumbs from you mean more than you can imagine. So, too, do we feast on the crumbs of God that are much more than crumbs.

Jesus gave the Canaanite woman the crumb she sought - *her daughter was healed instantly*. The crumb that was really a feast.

And we receive such feasts as well. With regard to the things of the world, not everyone gets the same feast, for our Father in heaven gives as He knows best. What is good for each one. So there are different feasts. There is the feast of physical healing and mercy. The feast of blessings and bounty. The feast of joys, and of talents and abilities. These for us to also share with one another, to give as He has given to us. Crumbs from Him, a feast for us, served from His merciful and gracious hand.

But even more, there is the feast we receive from the cross - the feast we need the most - from the crucified and nail-pierced hands of Jesus. You feast on His forgiveness won for us there. You feast on His Word which teaches you of this sacrifice and the love that kept Him there. You feast on His Body and Blood, given and shed for you. You feast in our fellowship, here, that the Lord has given us. These here for all the same, for we all have need of these. These gifts far more than crumbs . . .

Which is why the Son of David was there that day in the district of Tyre and Sidon. He had come to give Himself as the bread of life. He had come to set the severely demonized free. He had come to hear the prayers of desperate mothers, and set free a humanity and creation in bondage to sin and death. And He has.

For the one who *was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel*, He was there in the district of Tyre and Sidon for a reason, and He is here for the same reason. For *the lost sheep of the house of Israel* aren't only in Israel. For while that Canaanite woman may not have been of Israel by birth, she was by faith.

And that's true for all of us as well. We are not of Israel by birth, but we are by faith. True Israelites, the Church of God, the children of God, with a seat at the table. So we come to this table today, to receive the life and forgiveness and strength that we need, and look forward to the table that awaits us, with all the saints who have gone before us; the feast of heaven, which will have no end.

For that's why Jesus came, why He comes now, and why He will come again. Whether it's Israel, Tyre and Sidon, or here. To feed us now. To feed us forever. Crumbs that are never just crumbs when they come from Jesus.

And one day, when you arrive at the feast which has no end, look around. For departed friends and loved ones, fellow strugglers, who died in the faith. And maybe, just maybe, you also might see an old Canaanite woman and her daughter, who received a few crumbs of mercy, but a great feast of life.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.