

*21 Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. 22 Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon." 23 But he did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, "Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us." 24 He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." 25 But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me." 26 He answered, "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." 27 She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." 28 Then Jesus answered her, "Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish." And her daughter was healed instantly.*

In July my wife, Sue, and I went to Bolivia to visit our daughter, Elizabeth, who is a Peace Corps volunteer there. Each Sunday while we were there we attended worship at the nearest Roman Catholic church. Now my Spanish skills are very minimal – though I could understand where we were in the service and the one week that the gospel was printed I could figure out what it was saying, still I understood nothing of the sermon. But when I went forward and held out my hands, I received Christ's own body and blood. Language and culture were no barriers to my tasting the love of Christ.

Nor were language and culture a barrier to my comprehending as I left the church. For immediately I encountered outstretched hands – a reminder of my outstretched hands only moments before – many outstretched hands. And though the women spoke words I did not know, seeing them and their suffering children communicated all I needed to know. They were asking for my help - a coin or two - as much as I could spare.

I walked on by.

All the reading I had done in preparation for my trip said not to give out money. Every beggar that receives money will mean more people coming in from the country seeking handouts. Over time the handouts will be more harmful than helpful. Still, these were women with hungry suffering children. I walked by.

I suppose I could take some consolation this morning from Jesus' actions in our gospel reading. When the Canaanite woman started shouting, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon." Jesus did not answer her at all. Jesus himself intended to walk on by that outstretched hand. But she kept on

shouting. Now the word in the Greek that describes her shouting is the word, *krazo*. I read this week that that word comes from the sound of a raven's call. I am guessing that is much like the caw-caw of a crow. Irritating.

The disciples certainly thought so for they urged Jesus saying, "Send her away for she keeps on shouting after us."

Jesus answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

Jesus was not given responsibility for everyone and everything by God the Father, but was given responsibility to reach out to God's chosen people, Israel. Later others would be given responsibility to reach out to other nations and people but that was not Jesus' responsibility. If Jesus had not limited his area of concern there would not have been enough hours in the day for him to do what was assigned.

I think of young parents who are constantly being asked to do more. It is important that you pray for God to guide you in understanding what God wants you to be doing. Pray for the ability to discern the most important things in your life – give your energy and devotion to those. Do them well.

But back to our woman.

"She came and knelt before Jesus saying, 'Lord, help me.' Jesus answered, 'It is not fair to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs.' She said, 'Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table.'"

This woman knew her responsibility: her daughter. Not even being insulted by Jesus would distract her. She wanted what only he could give – she stayed respectful even when he was not respectful of her. She called him "Lord" every time she spoke to him - respectful, but not submissive. I think there was a sparkle in her eye as she spoke the words, "even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table."

This woman was not going to be a victim. Though life was certainly victimizing her she refused to be powerless.

If only the church of Jesus Christ could have her spirit as we seek to address the problems of hungry people, or how to educate students in Cleveland, Ohio, or what to do about meth abuse or how to curb violence in our society. It is easy to talk as victims – powerless, without hope. But I know that in so many places in Bolivia people are working to help those mothers who reached out with empty hands. Churches and agencies are working in every place in this world. They need our support.

When you give to the Benevolence programs of Christ Lutheran you are making a difference for people. Through the agencies and programs our congregation supports, people are blessed. Not all people in every place but some people. Other churches, other groups help other people. Through all of us God is at work.

On the day that woman came pleading Jesus gave what she needed. Hearing her response he declared, “Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.” And her daughter was healed instantly.

It would be a glorious day indeed if every daughter and son was likewise healed. But that day Matthew tells of only one in that region who was healed.

I know God is able to bless more than we can imagine through the efforts of the people of this congregation. When all of us are at work offering ourselves in the ways and the places to which God has assigned us thanksgivings to God overflow. No, we will not solve all the world’s problems but one by one people will be helped.

Just like that woman Jesus meant to walk on by.