

## **Lectionary 23 Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost Year B 2021**

### **September 5, 2021**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

In today's gospel passage, it sure sounds like Jesus is burnt out. He wants to go into a house and be alone, and be somewhere that no one knows where he is. In fact, he travels probably about a day's journey from where he was in order to get away, and he ends up about 30 miles away from the Sea of Galilee. He's left the region of Galilee, and traveled north, into Syrophenician territory. Jesus just needs to get away, he just needs a break. He likely feels as though he's got nothing left to give. He's been working hard teaching and healing every day. He's been dealing with crowds everywhere he goes and with disciples who don't seem to really understand what's going on. And there are people seeking his life. He knows he's got a hard road ahead of him, and he's got to get some rest. Maybe Jesus is burnt out, maybe he's not, but he's definitely exhausted.

And yet, Jesus can't get away. Even after leaving Galilee, and wandering a day's journey, Jesus just can't get away. A woman heard about Jesus, and as he enters the house, she runs up and bows at Jesus' feet. And Jesus just doesn't have it in him to help another person today. He's done. He's so done, in fact, that he says some pretty unkind things to this woman, when all she wants is help for her daughter. Jesus tells this woman that there's not enough of him to go around. He's come to serve the Jewish people. The Gentiles can get what they need only after the Israelites have all been cared for. And unfortunately, there's nothing left for the Gentiles today. Jesus just wants this woman to go away.

Perhaps you know what this feels like. Perhaps you've experienced feeling burnt out, like you've got nothing left to give, like you're just done. Or perhaps you've at least experienced extreme exhaustion. It seems like this is how our world works. Especially in the business realm, if you're not giving 110%, then you're not working hard enough. If you're not burning the midnight oil, if you're not working overtime and neglecting your family, then you're not worth keeping around.

Certainly, the pandemic has become absolutely exhausting. At first, we treated it like a sprint, trying to survive just a couple weeks, with the hope that things would be over quickly. We worked hard to prepare ourselves, our families, even our jobs for a time apart. We raced to arrange for remote worship, and we learned on the spot as the mandates and needs kept changing. Two weeks became two months, and two months became 18. We wore masks, we refrained from gathering with family and friends, we cancelled trips, and we made difficult choices that were not in the best interest of our businesses and livelihoods. And then, finally, most of us got our vaccines; we did our part to protect ourselves and one another. We thought we could see the light at the end of the tunnel. And yet, here we are, masked again, cases rising in our county and across the country as our children go back to school. I don't know about you, but I'm exhausted. There have been many moments in these long months, where I had reached my breaking point, and felt there was nothing left to give.

And so maybe we know what it feels like to have nothing left to give. Maybe we've reached that point at some time in our lives where it feels like all we have left to give are the crumbs that we dropped on the floor. Perhaps we've given what seems like every ounce of energy we have, and we couldn't possibly be loving and merciful to someone who is different from us, or to someone in need. And yet, here comes another request knocking at the door, another person asking more of us than we feel we have left to give, throwing themselves at our feet.

And all we want to do in that moment is close the door, turn off the lights, and pretend that no one's home. All we want to do is turn that person away and decline their request. And maybe we're so exhausted that we end up doing so in a pretty offensive way. Of course, this doesn't make our behavior acceptable, it doesn't mean that we're right to act this way, and we certainly can't say hurtful things to people simply because we're tired.

And thankfully, we usually have an opportunity to rest not too far off. We know that we just have to make it—to the holiday weekend, to the next day off, to the time in the day that we can go home, relax, and maybe hug our family. But Jesus didn't have this opportunity. Everywhere Jesus went, people were pressing in on him. And it seems like he has finally broken. The Syrophenician woman approached him respectfully, and begged for his help. And Jesus calls her a dog. It's not Jesus' most magnificent moment.

Yet, despite all this, despite the offensive words and even though Jesus is clearly exhausted and has only crumbs left to give, the woman persists. And what does she say? "*Even the crumbs are enough.* ... I don't need much, I'll take the leftovers; I'll take whatever is left behind. I know that even a little bit will be enough to grant the healing that my daughter needs."

And maybe we've been in this woman's situation too. Maybe we've experienced those moments of desperation, where we've asked for help and no one will listen, where we're willing to take whatever anyone will offer to us, even if it's just the crumbs.

Perhaps we've even had these moments with Jesus, where prayers don't seem to be answered, where we've done everything we can, and all we can do is fall at Jesus' feet and beg for even just the crumbs, just the smallest amount of attention, just a little bit of guidance, and even the smallest answer to our prayers. I've certainly been there.

And the truth is that in this story, as much as we might identify with Jesus and his exhaustion, we actually are more like the woman in need, begging at Jesus' feet. When nothing seems to be going right in our lives, when we're grasping at straws trying to figure out what to do, trying to imagine how else we can bring an end to this pandemic, when we need just a little bit of guidance or encouragement in order to keep going, maybe all we can do is throw up our hands, and beg for Jesus to help us.

And amazingly, for the woman and her daughter, Jesus simply speaks the words, and the girl is healed. Jesus *doesn't* provide "just the crumbs" for this woman. Jesus doesn't provide some long-shot possibility for healing her daughter. Jesus provides true healing, peace and rest for the girl.

And Jesus doesn't give us only crumbs either. Jesus promises that we, along with all of God's beloved children, receive abundant gifts from God each and every day. In the words of the prophet Isaiah, when God comes, "The eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy. Waters shall break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert; the burning sand shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water." God promises restoration for all people and for all of creation. God promises abundant life now and always for each of us.

And this is the life that we receive each week when we gather at the table. At the table Jesus breaks the bread and tells us, "This is my body, given for you." Jesus gives of himself in this gift, and we receive more than just the crumbs. There is plenty to go around. Through the meal that Christ has set before us, we are strengthened, we are restored, and we receive abundant and eternal life. So, come to the table. Come to receive the abundance that Christ has to offer us. Thanks be to God. Amen.