

Believing

Matthew 15:10-28

Introduction

In the summer of 1876, grasshoppers nearly destroyed the wheat crop in the state of Minnesota. So, as the spring of 1877 drew near, the farmers of Minnesota were worried. They knew that if a plague of grasshoppers would come for a second year in a row, the lives and livelihoods of thousands of people would be devastated.

So intense was the level of concern that Governor John S. Pillsbury proclaimed Wednesday, April 26, 1877 as a statewide day of prayer and fasting, urging every man, woman and child to ask God to prevent this terrible scourge from happening again. In response every school, store and office statewide was closed. The churches were packed with people praying and there was a reverent, quite hush over all the state.

The next day, April 27, dawned bright and clear. The April temperatures soared to highs that were typical of July and August. That was very unusual in Minnesota. Panic set in as farmers from all across the state reported the discovery of billions of grasshopper larvae wiggling to life. For three days the unusual heat persisted, serving as an incubator to help those larvae hatch. It wouldn't be long before grasshoppers once again started to feed on the wheat crop.

But on the fourth day, the temperature unexpectedly dropped to record lows. That night a killing frost covered the entire state. The result? Every one of those baby grasshoppers died. That day, April 30, 1877, went down in the history of Minnesota as the day God answered the prayers of the people."

Story #2:

Grant Stubbs and Owen Wilson were flying their small Cessna airplane around the Pelorus Sound valley in New Zealand. They were admiring the beauty of God's creation, when suddenly they heard a cough. A quick look at each other made them realize the cough was not coming from either of them but from another source. Before they could speak, there was another cough, followed by a wheeze, followed by a sputter. And then there was nothing but silence as their micro light plane engine died. They were out of fuel.

Grant and Owen were both Christians, so they immediately began to pray for God's protection. They knew their plane would need to clear the top of a ridge before they would have any hope of landing, and they had no idea what was on the other side of that ridge.

Owen reported later: "There was an instantaneous answer to our prayers as we crossed the ridge. There on the other side was an airfield. We didn't even know it existed until then. We landed the plane without any trouble. The plane coasted to a complete stop right next to a 20 foot tall sign that read 'Jesus is Lord.' When we saw that sign, we just started to laugh."

Aren't those great stories? Don't we serve an amazing God?!! Our God is big and powerful! If you have been around the church for any length of time, you have sung many songs about His greatness:

He has done great things Bless His holy name. (Andrae Crouch)

How Great Thou Art!

Our Scriptures too are filled with references to His greatness. If you are joining many of us in our journey through the Book of Psalms this year, you recently read these words from Psalm 95:

For the Lord is the great God, the great King above all gods. In his hand are the depths of the earth, and the mountain peaks belong to him. The sea is his, for he made it, and his hands formed the dry land. (Psalm 95:3-5)

In last week's Gospel, Jesus walked on the water. The prior week He fed more than 5,000 people with a little boy's lunch. Our God has parted the waters of the Red Sea, made the sun stand still, and created the heavens and the earth. Big, big stuff.

It is no wonder people seek out Jesus when they need something big in their lives.

But did you know our God also specializes in little stuff too?

Crumbs.

I was inspired by that truth six years ago when our family gathered to celebrate our 40th wedding anniversary. My then three-year-old granddaughter Allie had just finished eating her piece of cake. As she started to get up from the table, my son told her that the best part of the cake was still left on her plate.

- I looked, thinking she had left a glob of icing that I could quickly snatch, but all I saw were a few crumbs! While Allie and I watched, my son took his fork and carefully scooped every last one of those crumbs together into a pile in the middle of the plate and pressed them into his fork and then fed it to Allie. Allie agreed with her daddy that the last bite of crumbs was the best bite of them all.

Today's sermon features crumbs. Probably not chocolate cake crumbs. Probably those crumbs that come from some of that great crusty bread. Can you see all those crumbs? Also in this story is a woman who came to Jesus with a need. She wasn't looking for big stuff. She came ready to receive a few crumbs.

Crumbs make this story unique. Crumbs also make it a great picture of Christ's church. This summer as we build a vocabulary of words to describe the church God wants us to be – using words like CALLED, SENT, HUNGRY, WALKING, and so on – we come to this story about what a desperate mom believed about crumbs that had been brushed to the floor.

Our word for today is:

BELIEVING

Like one previous sermon, it does not show up in the text per se, but you still see it clearly in this verse:

Then Jesus said to her, "Woman, you have **great faith!** Your request is granted." And her daughter was healed at that moment. (Matthew 15:28)

I make two observations:

#1: BIG WAS MORE THAN SHE NEEDED

Look at verses 26-27:

(Jesus) replied, "It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs." "Yes it is, Lord," she said. "Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table."

Jesus talked to her about big, and she agreed with Him! "You are right, Lord. I'm not asking for bread, only crumbs." I don't need the cake. I am content with the crumbs.

She knew that God's crumbs were more than enough to handle the big need she had. She knew that, with God, it doesn't require much to get a great result.

- Mustard seeds grow great trees.
- A widow's two copper coins are greater than the bags of silver offered by wealthy men.

She believed that God could work miracles with mere crumbs. The God who created the world out of nothing had plenty of material in a few crumbs. Her faith allowed her to see the God's power in the dinner crumbs that had been brushed to the floor.

Her faith contrasted with the first half of the chapter where the religious leaders of the day wanted to debate with Jesus about dietary laws and what foods make you unclean. The only thing they believed about Jesus was that He was a trouble-maker.

This woman just wanted a crumb.

Her need was great. But she believed Jesus was greater.

- She didn't need to walk on water. She didn't require food to feed 5,000.
- The angels didn't need to sing. The waters didn't need to part.
- She just needed a crumb. She believed that was more than enough

Let me ask you this: When you come to God with a GREAT need, what do you expect Him to do? Are you looking for a GREAT response? Are you expecting something BIG and MAJESTIC? The waters parting? The earthquake rumbling? Or is a crumb enough?

There is a story in the Old Testament about a military hero named Namaan.

He was a great man in the sight of his master and highly regarded, because through him the Lord had given victory to Aram. He was a valiant soldier, but he had leprosy. (2 Kings 5:1)

Namaan went to the prophet Elisha to find healing. Insult above insult Elisha never even came out of his house to talk to this great man, but instead told him to go dunk himself in the dirty waters of the Jordan. If he did that crumb-like action, he would be healed.

Namaan's response?

I thought that he would surely come out to me and stand and call on the name of the Lord his God, wave his hand over the spot and cure me of my leprosy. (2 Kings 5:11)

Namaan wanted big. He was offered crumbs. Because he didn't get the big showy response, the text says Namaan "went off in a rage" (2 Kings 5:12) He would have died from leprosy if one of his servants had not intervened:

If the prophet had told you to do some great thing, would you not have done it? How much more, then, when he tells you, 'Wash and be cleansed!'" (2 Kings 5:13)

Namaan listened to his servant, and was healed. He ate the crumbs, and the leprosy was gone.

Learning to be content with crumbs is a mark of spiritual maturity. Every Christian, whether they are heartbroken mothers or military heroes must learn the power of the crumbs.

So why is that a hard lesson to learn? Observation #2:

#2: BIG WAS MORE THAN SHE DESERVED

Nothing about this woman – from a human perspective – merited receiving anything. Look at how she is described in this text:

A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him... (Matthew 15:22)

She was:

- A woman. Cultural rules dictated that men and women could not speak to one another.
- A Canaanite. That mean she was a Gentile. Someone considered to be incapable of knowing God. The Canaanites had been trouble for the Jews since they entered the Promised Land.
- The Gospel of Mark adds that she spoke Greek.

Her language was wrong. Her gender was wrong, Her nationality was wrong. From the vantage point of the disciples, this woman was the ultimate undeserving recipient. She had no business coming to Jesus.

"Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us." (Matthew 15:23)

The disciples saw themselves as deserving. They were men. They were Jews. They were followers of Jesus. She was none of those things. Send her away! She is bothering us.

Notice that Jesus did not consider her to be undeserving. The disciples did. Jesus saw her faith. And He granted her request.

That was Namaan the leper's problem. He saw himself as worthy, as deserving. "I qualify for BIG. It is beneath me to accept crumbs!"

That is the sin of this generation. Everyone thinks they are deserving. We live in a world of Namaan's rather than a world of heartbroken mothers. We live in a world where people expect BIG – look at me. I'm important. We need to live in a world where people throw themselves at the feet of Jesus and say "I don't deserve anything from you, but I'm begging you, Lord, have mercy on me."

APPLICATION

Jesus responds to everyone who cries out for mercy. Even if no one thinks they deserve it. Jesus is moved by anyone who will be content with the crumbs. We call that "grace."

One final story:

One day a man was walking through an art gallery when he came upon a painting of the Jesus dying upon the cross. He stopped and looked at the beautiful portrait of Calvary's love. While he was staring into the face of Christ, a face that was so full of agony, one of the docents tapped him on the shoulder.

"Lower," the docent said. "The artist painted this picture to be appreciated from a lower position."

So the man bent down. And the docent was right! From this lower position the man observed new beauties in the painting that he had not seen before.

"Lower," said the docent. "Lower still." The man knelt down on one knee and looked up into the face of Christ. Again, the new vantage point yielded new beauties to behold and appreciate.

But the docent motioned yet again. "Lower. You've got to go lower." The man now dropped down on all fours and looked up. Only then as he looked up at the painting from this position of humility at the feet of Jesus, only then was he able to see the full beauty of the cross.

Amen.