

**A Dogsological People**  
**Psalm 146:1-2, 3-7, 10 and Mark 7:24-30**  
**5 September 2021**

(After reading the Psalm) –

**Before** I go on to the gospel reading this morning, I want to tell you about something that happened recently. Ann and I have a **son** in Georgia who, in addition to having two lively daughters also has a **dog** we love. The dog's name is Huckleberry. He's a Yellow Lab; and he's as sweet as a Georgia peach!

So, Neale, our son, sent us a video to laugh over. There was Sibley, our two-year old grand-daughter, sitting in her highchair in the kitchen... and she was laughing like crazy. And there was Huck, waiting on the floor beneath her, watching as she picked up pieces of whatever was on her tray and dropped them **down** to him... one after another.

Have you ever seen a dog **smiling**? – not one of those photoshopped pictures, but an **actual** smile on the face of a dog? I have! On Huckleberry. He was definitely smiling! He was O so happy... enjoying the droppings, down there underneath Ms. Sibley's table! Why, it wouldn't have **surprised** me if Huck had broken out in **song**! And **in what sort** of song would a Labrador Retriever **break out**, you ask? Why, the Dogsology, of course! What else?!

**Mark 7:24-30**

From there, Jesus set out and went away to the region of Tyre.  
He entered a house, and did **not** want **anyone** to know he was **there**.  
Yet he could not escape notice; but a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately heard about him, and she came and bowed down at his feet.  
Now the woman was a Gentile, of Syrophenician origin.  
She begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter.  
He said to her, *Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs.*  
But she answered him, *Lord, even the **dogs** under the table eat the **children's** crumbs.*  
Then he said to her, *For saying that, you may go – the demon has left your daughter.*  
So, she went home, found the **child** lying on the bed, and the **demon** gone.

Jesus – after a **long** spell of preaching and teaching... after ministering to vast, clamoring crowds, day after day... after healing the diseased, casting out demons, feeding great gatherings of people... **and** facing serious **pushback** from a slew of jealous antagonists – Jesus finally bugged out. He went off, Mark tells us, to the region of Tyre... to a coastal community on the Mediterranean, up above Galilee. And he did **not** want **anyone** to know he was there. (It’s not hard to imagine why!) And yet, Mark says, he could not **escape** notice.

*Hey – that’s **him** – the one those **Galileans** told us about... the man who’s been healing lepers and turning water into wine and telling wonderful stories. I heard that he **even** flushed a pack of demons out of a Gerasene fellow. Left him as sane as you are. Very impressive!*

Well, that certainly brought folks running – and one person in particular – a woman, a Gentile, who had a young daughter who was caught in the grip of some kind of evil spirit. She bowed... she fell... at Jesus’ feet. And she begged him... **begged** him... to free her child. And how did Jesus respond to her? Well, let’s just say that there are some *differences of opinion* about that... **and** some pretty **strong** feelings.

There are some persons who hear Christ’s words about it not being “*fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs*” as a pretty nasty slam at the Gentile woman... like he was calling **her**... or her **daughter**... a **dog**?!! Not particularly gracious, Jesus.

But, **other** people are more charitable toward Jesus. Maybe he was tired, they suggest, and it came out wrong. **You** know how **that** goes, don’t you? (I mean, he’s only human. Well, not **only** human. But, surely, we could cut him **some** slack, right?)

Still others make the **case** that Christ was simply **staying** properly focused. He **knew** he’d been **given a mission** – To seek and to save the lost sheep of Israel. And he was just trying to **keep** that mission **front and center**.

People have **approached** this passage from quite a few perspectives. And there really is a lot there for us to unpack and consider. But **two** things in particular **strike me**: First, I noticed that Jesus did not respond to the woman with a flat out NO. He said, *Let the children be fed first*. That **implies**, I’d **think**, that there would be a **then** – **first**, the children... **then**, others, like her daughter.

The **second** thing that stands out for me is the way the woman **responded** to that statement: She agreed. She consented. *Yes, Lord*, she said to Jesus. Yes, **Lord**. I'm **guessing** the woman wouldn't have used **that particular** title **if** she'd felt rudely **put down** by Jesus. Instead of *Lord*, she might have used *Teacher*, or *Mister*. However, she **called** him *Lord*... **signifying** her respect, her willingness to obey him, her consent to his will and intentions. *Yes, Lord... as you say. First supply the needs of those children you're called by God to serve.* Sitting at Christ's feet, her *Yes, Lord* seems to me to be an expression of genuine respect. But then she voices something more: *Let's not forget that even the **dogs** under the **table** eat the children's **crumbs**. They **get** to eat the children's crumbs.*

*Indeed, they do*, I can imagine Christ thinking. *Indeed, they **will**. That* – I imagine him saying to her – *is full of truth and full of trust. This bread from heaven **will find its way** from one needy soul to another. Apparently, it already has. So, my daughter, for **saying** that, you may get up now and go. The demon has left your daughter. Rise and go your way.*

I wonder – where in this story do you find **yourself**? Anywhere? Do you find yourself **looking** at it from a **distance**, as if it's a scene in some play you're watching? Might you be one of the hungry children Jesus wants to feed first? Are you Jesus himself, being asked for help? Or the demon-possessed child, whose mother has gone off in search of Christ's help? Mark certainly gives us a **lot** to think about in this story. It is rich and instructive.

But **more** than **instructing me**, it seems to **locate** me... most profoundly at the feet of our Lord, under the table. It gives me a way of seeing myself... and you, with whom I'm worshipping this sabbath... as those who are **in that** sacred **space**... sitting at the feet of our Lord... waiting on him... depending on him... and trusting him to **supply** what he knows we need. He **will** supply what he knows we need. It **will** come, I know... because, in Jesus' world, that is what happens. In Jesus' world, five loaves and two fish are blessed and broken and then distributed to a crowd of people; and everyone eats... everyone tastes and sees that the Lord is good! And then, twelve **baskets** of **crumbs** are gathered up to be redistributed! And those who receive, **rejoice**! O, **do** they **rejoice** over the abundance that their Lord provides!

**To** those who gather around Jesus... who wait at his feet in humility and trust and anticipation... the bread of life is given... the word of life comes down... the wine of salvation is poured out... the grace of reconciliation is extended... those on the edge are welcomed in... those who've been dispossessed are restored... those who

are wounded are made whole once again... holy community's created... and life opens up anew!

Has it ever, in **any** way, been **like** this for you? Do you **ever** remember **receiving** here, or somewhere else, what was **clearly** from above... and do you **then** remember rejoicing over the goodness of the Lord and his provision for your needs?

And here's where it **really** gets interesting: That dog who's here beside us... here, down below the table above... catches **sight** of a morsel that's on its way down... and **catches** it just as happily as good old Huck did... and immediately heads off with it... down the aisle and out the front door... and gently lays that morsel down beside the fellow lying there – *Lazarus* is what he goes by. It is, you **see**, one beggar sharing bread with another!

In a **similar** way, some of **you** head over to the Correctional Center to build a relational bridge to a troubled youngster. Others head over to the Education wing to welcome students into their church school classes. A car full of donated groceries goes off to a food pantry. Notes of support and well-blessed prayer shawls arrive in the homes of those facing surgery or chemotherapy. Dozens show up at city council meetings to advocate for more affordable housing and programs to curb gun violence here. Someone goes down the street to greet a new neighbor, and **offers** to **bring** her to worship next week. A family of refugees is welcomed and befriended... is cared for carefully, and with compassion, as it makes a profoundly hard transition... but not on its own. Someone... sitting in this sanctuary right now, feeling hungry for a relationship with God, in the midst of this quite foolish sermon, feels a hand come to rest on his shoulder, briefly... and knows he's not alone.

In **Jesus'** world, that is how it is. And in **your** world, is that **not** how it is? Isn't this how it's **meant** to be? And doesn't it just CRY for a doxology?

Ruff... ruff ruff ruff ruff, ruff... ruff... ruff....