

Sermon, August 16, 2026
"Dog's Breakfast"
Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost
St. Luke's Church, Wilton, Maine

Once upon a time, a woman called the local vicar and asked him if he would officiate at a funeral for her dog. ... The priest was a bit put off by the request, and with a somewhat disgusted tone in his voice, he suggested that there was no way he could do such a thing, and that she might try one of the other churches in the area. She agreed to do that but not before she asked the priest for some advice. "Do you think £500 is an appropriate honorarium for a funeral of this kind? she asked, and should I make the cheque out to the minister or to the church?" The priest quickly cleared his throat and said, "Wait a minute, why didn't you tell me your dog was Church of England."

Dogs show up very little in our scriptures but there is the saying that every dog has their day so why not a Sunday where they get a little more center stage? It's a modern and western custom to sentimentalize and befriend our dogs. Why we have health insurance for dogs, gourmet foods, pampering and grooming and some synagogues even have a "bark" mitzvah. It isn't like that in other cultures and certainly wasn't in the time of Jesus. Dogs were scavenging curs. They didn't belong to anybody and survived, literally, by getting the crumbs off someone's table.

This is the worldview from which Jesus makes the statement in today's gospel to a Gentile woman who pleads with him for healing for her daughter. He says , "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel... It isn't right to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." It's a shocking line. On the surface, it seems ignorant, exclusive, meant to dismiss and demean. People have tried to rationalize and soften this remark over the centuries. I've had people say to me, "My Jesus would never say something like that". Well honey he ain't your Jesus and he's a Jesus who was fully human, a first-century Jew born into a world of boundaries, discrimination and exclusion. It's so easy to idealize him in a completely unrealistic way. He was a person of his time. That's what being a person is—it goes with the territory of incarnation.

Matthew lets us see that Jesus is human. This is a Jesus who learns and develops—like any of us. This is a Jesus who has to respond to what goes on around him—like any of us. This is a Jesus who doesn't know everything—like any of us. This is a Jesus who is genuinely human. But look at the nature of his humanity. Most of the time our prejudices win the day and that's that. Like in the reaction of the disciples, to them the woman is clearly beyond the bounds: a nuisance they want to be rid of.

But Jesus lets the nuisance engage him. This brave woman comes back at him powerfully. She enters into Jesus' own logic to teach him the meaning of his own tradition. She doesn't argue that she is not a dog (although don't we wish she did). She doesn't turn away hurt, offended, and disappointed. The matter is too important for her to worry about her feelings. She says, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table". Even dogs are included.

These words have a profound effect on Jesus. It's as if he suddenly remembers the words of Isaiah, "Thus says the Lord God, who gathers the outcasts of Israel: I will gather others to them besides those already gathered". And she is good at repartee. Her analogy is better than his: 'even the dogs,' she says, 'eat the crumbs that fall from the table.' And in the encounter Jesus changes—that's what humans are really good at when they are brave enough to chance it. The woman teaches Jesus something new about the Kingdom—she widens its inclusion to be genuinely inclusive. And Jesus realizes the truth of it: 'Woman, great is your faith!'

So what about us? There's a saying, "the day you can no longer change is the day you stop being a human being". I think the time we're living in right at this moment is a lot like this short encounter in today's gospel. The disparity between those who sit at the table and those who get the crumbs has widened. The rich have been getting richer and the poor poorer. There is an argument in the halls of our national government and many state governments that it is white people only who should be at the table, and not just white people but specifically white men, and not just white men but white Christian men who belong to the "right" Christian religion. And over the last seventy years, but particularly again today, there has been a societal push back. People who have only been getting the crumbs from the table for a long time want our culture to change and are saying, "Look at me here I am. We want a full seat at the table. Women, folk of color, LGBTQ+ folk. They are engaging those in power for a full place at the table. And how do we respond? As individuals, as Church, as nation? As an Episcopal Church we have widened our tent to be as inclusive as possible though it took us many years to get to that place and we still can do better. Can we learn like Jesu, can we widen the table, can we respond with understanding and compassion and healing?

The term "dog's breakfast," has been British slang for "a complete mess" since at least the 1930s. While no one took the time to write down the exact origin of the phrase, the allusion involved seems to be to a failed culinary effort, perhaps a burned or botched omelet, fit only for consumption by the mouth of last resort, Fido. But perhaps it's a good analogy for our world today. We are quite a vast melange of humanity with all our warts and foibles and biases and varieties and some think we may not survive much longer, but if we accept

ourselves for what we are and not pretend to be Eggs Benedict, perhaps we can channel that best part of our humanity to really look at each other in all our glorious botchedness, and accept each other, maybe even learn to love each other. And maybe we will find healing too. Not instantly but over time. Enjoy your breakfast!