

Jesus Gets Pestered

Mark 7:24-30

Sunday, September 5, 2021 at The First Congregational Church of Marshalltown, Iowa

- *Introduction*

Many years ago I heard a divinity student from a prestigious university preach on this passage. His main point is that Jesus had to outgrow cultural biases just like the rest of us and this mother, whose child was very ill, helped Jesus to grow. But I don't think that Jesus needed to outgrow any cultural bias, but rather this episode was a lesson in patience and in perseverance. Over and over again the Bible tells us to persevere in life and to persevere in prayer. Don't be quick to give up.

- *Set the stage*

Let the children be filled first, for it is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs.

To set the stage, Jesus is in Gentile territory and wants to keep to Himself. He is, apparently, a guest in a house and is trying to have "down time" but His reputation has preceded Him and a woman comes to the door, asking for Him. She is Greek, a Syrian from Phoenicia, which is about as pagan as you can get at that time. The region, ancient and mentioned frequently in the Old Testament, worshiped several gods and held the principal temple to the god of healing. It's pretty safe to say that she is not Jewish in any way. She asks Him to cast a demon out of her daughter and she will not go away, so she pesters Jesus. For all we know, she had been to the temple of the god of healing but nothing worked and she simply gets in His way. The word "to pester", by the way, originally meant "to impede or entangle" and after He gets entangled by this person He issues a challenge.

- *He puts her to the test-will she persevere?*

Jesus says to her, "Let the children be filled first, for it is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs." Somewhere, over thirty years ago, someone at a prestigious seminary was horrified that such a harsh statement came from our Lord, but I don't think it is that simple. In the Israel of Jesus' day, non-Jews were called "dogs". It was not a complement, but there were two words for "dog". One referred to a violent mongrel who roved the countryside in packs, attacking livestock and endangering children, but there was another word for "dog". This word referred to a "puppy" who was a beloved pet and often stayed under the table during supper as they often got the leftovers or food that the kids did not like. Jesus used the second word

Still, it wasn't exactly encouraging. It may be that Jesus was challenging her to persevere. Rabbis in those days would often answer an question or inquiry with a stock answer, one that was correct but not very deep. Once, when Jesus was travelling, a person asked Him about gaining eternal life. Jesus gave a stock answer, saying "you know the Ten Commandments, obey those." It was correct as far as it went, but Jesus wanted to see how badly the questioner wanted to get to the heart of the matter. It think He did something similar here. It think He was saying, in effect, "I'm called to the children of Israel for now, the rest of the world comes later." But she did not give up.

- *Her response-humility but will not give up*

She continued to pester Jesus, and takes His imagery in her response. She replies, "Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs under the table eat from the children's crumbs." She basically said that while the family pets don't get to snatch food from the table or from the children's plates, but they still get fed. Jesus shows His "hatred" of all Gentiles by telling her that she may go her way, the demon has left her child. Apparently, she takes Him at His word and leaves, and later reported that she indeed found her daughter at home and well. What's the application for us?

- *Application: Persevere in prayer*

We are told specifically in Scripture to persevere in prayer. Jesus even told a story about a wicked judge do did justice for widow just as she would leave him alone. How much more will God respond to His children who call out to Him day and night. He does not act according to our timing, but He does act. It would also be helpful to do what the church does with our prayer requests; we keep a log. We sometimes receive answers to prayers that we forgot we had prayed. Finally, take some time, if you have it, to review the Book of Job. Bible teachers used to debate the purpose of Job, until one person noted that the only New Testament reference to the person of Job is in James, and it notes his perseverance. Job shows us what it looks like to persevere through troubles.

- *Conclusion*

In conclusion, Jesus, far away from home in a foreign land, desired to be alone, but was pestered by Greek women of Syrian origin, from a pagan land far removed from Judaism and Israel. She wants help for her daughter. Jesus puts her to the test, but she perseveres and her daughter is made well. It reinforces what is said elsewhere in Scripture; pray without ceasing and persevere in prayer.

Prayers

Krystal Randall asks that we pray for Jennifer Rabbitt (Charlie's mom) and her family at the loss of her mother, Kathy Rabbitt, on August 31st.