

“There is no fall from Grace”

Gospel Reading: Matthew 15:21-28

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A billion people watched as she jumped up onto the 4 inch beam. The competition was beginning the second rotation as she took the smallest misstep. Before she executed her first difficult move, she stumbled and fell. It took less than a minute for the drama to unfold and the commentators to talk about dashed hopes and dreams. A billion people watch because of the possibility of a fall. Without a fall, there is no danger, no great soars to glory, no sport. It's amazing as a spectator to witness her stand on a 4 inch beam and dive into the air.

The Canaanite woman in this story is similarly brave walking out on this seemingly narrow path. She leaps on to the scene with a shout and it looks like she is in for a dramatic freefall. “Send her away” the disciple advice Jesus. She has stepped onto treacherous ground because she is a single foreign woman in a circle of religious men. As Jesus and the disciples approach the transfiguration and Jerusalem they are drawing bigger crowds with increasing pressure and scrutiny from the religious authorities. The implications of every action are mounting. She can do nothing but hurt their mission and so she is a deficit.

Then with surgical precision an argument ensues between Jesus and the woman. He explains he has come first for the house of Israel, and that she lives outside that world. It would be like giving dogs food meant for children. The mission may well go unfulfilled if they are constantly distracted by the needs and worries of the whole world. Then, stepping out past of all bounds and her own social status she looks at him and says, “Even the dogs deserve the crumbs under the table”, and for only the second time in all the gospels, he concedes the argument and commends her faith.

*(Falling girl my Marcus Hummon and Shakespeare---Sung by Laura)*

*Oh, the Falling girl is a sight to see, you can hold your breath, you can gasp and scream.  
But it's all an act, it's a sweet charade, when the crowds are gone, the girl gets paid.  
And I'd cry myself to sleep, I'd pray Oh, give me strength to dance the wire someday.  
But all I can do is paint her beautiful pain. I see they glory like a shooting star. Fall to  
the base earth from the firmament. They sun sets weeping in the lowly west, Witnessing  
storms to come, woe and unrest. All the world's a stage and we're mere players.*

We can approach this story with an Olympic mentality and watch the drama unfold as a distant spectator. We can marvel at the words and dissect the repartee. But if we walk

farther into the story, we may hear the Gospel. The presupposition is that Canaanites are the “they” in this world. As the “other” it is unnecessary to extend grace and hospitality. “They” can’t expect “us” to drop everything to help “them”. “They” are unbelievers, “we” are Jews. “They” are women, “we” are men. “They” are poor unwed mothers who can’t even take care of their own children; “we” already have full plates.

A switch flips though when she stands in there and for the sake of her daughter takes on world religion for a crumb of mercy. It is no longer a game. We suddenly remember the poverty of our own lives. We feel “they” and “us” being erased. We pray, “Somebody help her for God’s sake”. Score cards are dropped and judgment evaporates. She has become the preacher to the forgetful disciples and in her preaching for crumbs humbles us and teaches that there is no fall from grace, it is infinite and all around us. If we stand on the sidelines judging, worrying about winning and losing, we have missed it.

Two weeks ago I preached a sermon on scarcity and abundance and the need to offer our scarcity to God and be thankful for both the fast and feast times. The area of scarcity had to do with money for Magdalene, the ministry to woman coming off the streets with criminal records of addiction and prostitution that began out of this community in 1997. Magdalene has always been a place to learn about grace in the gospel. This week, as we continued to try to find money, I learned that I still think the real food at the table is for them, not us. I think sometimes that the work of Magdalene is the work of asking for crumbs and settling for less. Also this week there was an email from the farm where we are baptizing 10 people from this community in two weeks. The email said, “The creek is dry. There is no water.” This Gospel came to life for me in the news of that dry creek bed.

The Canaanite woman, our pastor, and defender of faith, stands before God on our all behalves and says, “We will take the crumbs. It is more than we have out here on our own.” It is not settling for less taking the crumb. It is grace and because it is infinite a crumb is not more or less than a loaf. During these lean and drought times I keep thinking in dollars and quantities, I keep thinking there are winners and losers, like we are walking a balance beam of faith. There is no difference in scarcity and abundance in the presence of the infinite, there is just grace.

If we can lean on the faith of the Canaanite woman this morning we can know that it is enough to Baptize 10 babies with a tear drop of water. That is a miracle. It is a miracle to know grace is there, there is no falling from it, and taking a crumb of it is as good as a feast anywhere else.

There is richness in all our poverty when we taste God’s love offered to us in it.  
There is poverty in all our wealth when we forget to share God’s love with others.  
There is grace when the lines between the two disappear.