

Aug 17, 2014 – Matthew 15:21-28

Remember your place! That is something someone might say to you if do or say something you shouldn't because you have overstepped your bounds. A supervisor may say it to an employee under him who tells him how he should be doing his job. A parent may say it to a child who thinks that he or she knows better than their parents. When someone tells us to remember our place it usually makes us angry.

Our sermon text encourages us to remember our place. To remember our place as an unworthy sinner, and to remember our place as a chosen disciple of Jesus.

Jesus had gone to the northwestern most border of Galilee along the coast of the Mediterranean sea, even into the Gentile region of Tyre and Sidon. He went to get away from the crowds and to spend some time alone with His disciples, but that didn't work very well. A Canaanite woman found out that they were there and came crying out after them for help. She had obviously heard of the miracles Jesus had been performing and she seems to have been familiar with some of the Messianic promises, as she called Jesus "Son of David." But Jesus didn't answer her a word. What would you have done if Jesus ignored you? But this didn't stop the woman; she kept on asking for help.

The disciples came to Jesus to ask Him to do something about this woman, and He said in v. 24: "*I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.*" We don't know if the woman heard Jesus say this or not. God doesn't tell us one way or another. But imagine she did hear these words. If you were this woman, how would you have responded? I probably would have given up and gone home. But if she did hear them, she didn't give up.

This exchange between Jesus and the disciples gave her the opportunity to come near and worship (literally kneel) before Jesus and again ask for help. While she may not have heard Jesus words in v. 24, she definitely did hear His reply in v. 26: "*It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs.*"

The children here are the children of Israel, the descendants of Abraham, and Jesus calls this non-Jewish woman a dog! This term isn't as great of an insult as it may seem. It refers to a domesticated canine, a pet dog, so Jesus isn't calling her a "stray dog", one of those dogs that wander the street eating garbage, but still! If Jesus were to call you a dog, how would you feel? When He says "*It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs*", He is essentially saying: "you are not worthy of my help!"

How does the woman respond? She says, "*Yes, Lord.*" She accepts the fact that she is just a "little dog." She knows her place. She knows that she has no claim on Jesus or any right to demand His help.

What about us? I don't believe anyone here is a physical descendent of Abraham. So should the children's bread be given to you?

The truth is, by nature, we don't even deserve to be called "little dogs." We are born sinful and have committed countless sins. We have done what God doesn't want us to do and failed so often to do the things He wants us to do. We are not worthy of a place in His house, even if it under the table begging scraps, but rather we deserve to be thrown out of the house into outer darkness, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth.

But that is why Jesus came to earth. He came to suffer and die for your sins. Don't misunderstand Jesus' words here. He is not saying that He came to save only the Jews. In the Gospels we see a number of non-Jews that Jesus did help: He healed the centurion's servant, in chapter 4 He

healed all the sick who were brought to Him from Syria, and remember that the one leper of the ten whom Jesus healed, who came back to worship Him, was also not a Jew. And Jesus did help the woman here, and healed her daughter, as we see in v. 28. But Jesus' *earthly* ministry was focused on the Jews. Back in chapter 10, when He sent out His disciples, He told them: "*Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter a city of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.*" (Matt 10:5-6) But after His resurrection, what did He tell them to do? "*Make disciples of all the nations*" (Mat 28:19) and to "*go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.*"

So Jesus did come to pay for your sins and take away your guilt, and mine. Through Jesus' death and resurrection God has reconciled you to Himself. So you are now part of the household of God (Eph 2:19).

But are you content to be just "a little dog" eating "*the crumbs which fall from from [the] master's table?*" Or do you think you deserve better?

God does not show favoritism. Our pedigree does not carry any weight with Him. While the things we do in faith are pleasing to God, they do not earn His favor. Jesus once asked His disciples if a master would serve his servant dinner when the servant turned after working in the field. Of course not. Jesus concluded: "*So you also, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.'*" (Luke 17:10)

In this account we do see a distinction between the Jews and Gentiles. The Jews often thought they were better than all the other nations. But there is really no difference. Gal 3:28-29 says: "*There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.*" We have no reason to boast. We are all equally sinners, and we are all equally redeemed. And our redemption is all God's doing.

So remember your place as an unworthy sinner whom God has saved through His Son. You have been adopted as His child, so you do now have a place at His table. You do not have to beg for scraps, but He gives you the Bread of Life promised to His children. Not only that, but Jesus has chosen you to be His friend and His disciple.

That leads to the question: what is our place as a chosen disciple of Jesus? Looking at what Jesus' disciples do in our text can help us answer this question.

It seems that in the Gospels, however, Jesus' disciples often give us a bad example. This account is no exception. In v. 23 we read that "*His disciples came and urged Him, saying, 'Send her away, for she cries out after us.'*" To be fair to the disciples, this really isn't as harsh as it sounds in our English translation. In the original Greek the request to "*send her away*" is more neutral, and it leaves it up to Jesus to decide whether He will help the woman or not. Perhaps "do something" would better convey this idea. Jesus could "do something" about her by granting her request or by just telling her to go away. Jesus' response in v. 24 shows us that He took their words as a request to help the woman.

That does not mean that the disciples motives were all that noble, however. I don't think that they were all that concerned about the woman's situation, but were more concerned about themselves. They were bothered by her crying out after them so they wanted Jesus to deal with her so they could have some peace and quiet. In case you're wondering, this is a bad example of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus.

God wants us to “*comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all*” (1 Thess 5:14). We are to “*bear one another’s burdens*” (Gal 6:2). But is there anyone with whom you would rather not deal? I’m sure we can all think of someone who has tried or currently tries our patience. Don’t we often wish that someone else would deal with that person, so that we don’t have to. “Send her away, for she cries out after us.” But remember your place as Jesus’ chosen disciple and remember what God has done for you.

I have already mentioned how Jesus tells us, His disciples, to go into all creation and preach the gospel to all creatures. We see many good examples of the disciples doing just that in the book of Acts. But how often do we fail in our mission to share this good news?

Several months ago I was talking with a coworker about my future as Pastor. He mentioned that his former business partner didn’t want anything to do with religion. In the course of our conversation, my coworker made the comment that he tries to live a good life, implying he was trusting in his own goodness to get him to heaven. I failed to take the opportunity to remind him that he is an unworthy sinner and that it is only by what Jesus has done that he can go to heaven. I failed as Jesus’ disciple. I think we can think of similar situations where we have failed to take advantage of the opportunities God has given us.

But there is more to being a disciple. In 1 Peter 2 we read: “*But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.*” This verse shows us that another aspect is being a priest. This involves not only bringing God’s word to people, as we have been talking about, but also interceding – that is, praying – for them.

Whom did the Canaanite woman ask Jesus to help? In v. 22 she said: “*Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David! My daughter is severely demon-possessed.*” She wasn’t asking for something for herself, but she was asking Jesus to help her daughter. She was interceding for her daughter.

If you look at the time you spend praying for yourself vs. the time spent praying for someone else, how do the two compare? I know that I spend far more time praying about myself than I do praying for others. Not that it is wrong to pray for ourselves; God tells us in all things to make our requests known to God. We all have friends, family and acquaintances that need our prayers.

Talking about all these things that are a part of being Jesus’ disciple is rather depressing, at least it is to me. I see all the things that I should be doing and how how far I fall short. I am reminded again that I am an unworthy sinner.

But remember your place!

Jesus told His disciples: “*You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit*” (John 15:16). The same is true for you. Jesus has chosen you.

In the Gospels we see Jesus’ disciples trying to prevent people from bringing children to Him, arguing over who is the greatest, wanting to stop someone who was casting out demons in Jesus name because he wasn’t part of their group. A couple of them wanted to call down fire on a city that refused to welcome them. We see them failing time and again to understand what Jesus was trying to teach them and they were even afraid to ask Him, their own teacher, what He meant. And yet Jesus chose them to be his disciples. And He also chose you and me to be His disciples. We may wonder, “What was He thinking?”

After Jesus ascended into heaven He send the Holy Spirit upon the disciple to empower them to be His disciples, to be His witnesses to the ends the earth. In the same way He gives us the Holy Spirit in baptism, the Spirit who gives you the will and the power to do the good works God has prepared for you to do. When we do fail and fall short, Jesus is there at the right hand of God as our High Priest, making intercession for us because He has paid for all our sins and all of our failings.

So remember your place – as an unworthy sinner who has been redeemed and forgiven through the blood of Jesus Christ, so that you are now His chosen disciple. And rejoice in your glorious place in God’s kingdom!