

Come Closer
Genesis 45: 1-15 and Matthew 15: 21-28
August 16, 2020
Eastminster Presbyterian Church

Have you ever heard the story about Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day, where it seems nothing is going as Alexander really wants? With tongue in cheek, that could probably describe Jesus' day as we come into this story. This Nazareth-raised boy did not get the "welcome home" he had expected. His family and friends are not taking him seriously. They imagine that he might be acting a bit too big for his britches. They are not buying into his teachings. And as if that is not frustrating enough, his heart is saddened. As we have heard for the past few weeks, we are again reminded that his friend John has been beheaded. In his grieving, Jesus has tried to grab a bit of solitary time, but people, like little ants, swarm him everywhere he goes. He has just blessed, broken and shared bread and fish with five thousand. He has walked on water; and yet his students are having a hard time grasping that this Jesus is the real deal; he is the Son of God.

Some terrible, horrible, no good, very bad days have been companion to our Lord, but then, this needy woman shows up with absolutely no doubts about who she believes Jesus is. Her daughter is sick and she believes the Son of God can heal her. And Jesus is stumped. This is not the way he envisioned his day, but here she is. What is he to do?

In our day and time, we would say that this woman lived "on the wrong side of the tracks." We would point out that she worshipped other "gods" (small g) before the one God of all creation. We would say that cleanliness was not next to godliness for her and her kind. From his purest human emotion, Jesus wants nothing to do with her. Enough is enough! He has so little left to give, and that reserve of mercy and compassion, forgiveness and salvation is just enough for his kind, the Jews. There is nothing left for the Gentiles.

Just before Jesus shuts the proverbial door in her face, she comes closer, in essence sticking her body in just far enough to fall to her knees and plead: Lord, help me!

How often do we have those "Lord, help me moments?" For me, especially lately, quite often. When I have cried out, it is unfathomable to me that Jesus would ignore or close the door on me. I trust the Lord's hearing and helping, and so does this woman. And that's the great switch-a-roo in this story. She is not willing to give up on Jesus.

In response to her cries, we hear those crushing words from Jesus: I am here to feed the souls of my kind, but not yours. It is a rare glance at the human side of Jesus. Worn out. Rejected. Discouraged. Sick of people wanting him to "do" things for them; yet, refusing to acknowledge that his authority to them comes from God. They are unable or unwilling to see that his message, his mission, is more than just a "make you feel better" kind of scheme. His life's purpose is to restore the relationship between God and God's people, who for most of Jesus's life have been Jews. Yet here is this little Gentile dynamo who insists that she is part of the family too. Nope, this day is not going as Jesus had imagined.

It is not too much of a stretch for us to get inside Jesus' head. We often feel overwhelmed and surrounded by so much need. We are God's sons and daughters. Our hearts want to be good. We want to do the right thing. But, how much is enough? Or not enough? Or too much? At every turn, the television, newspaper, billboards, internet, postal service, we find someone or something needs "something" from us. Money. Time. Energy. A shoulder.

But, we have to draw the line somewhere, do we not? We must make decisions about what we can do and who we can help. We often become frustrated when those "outside the lines" push on us, are unwilling to give up. The closer they come, the further we push away. Jesus did. And in a moment of human ugliness Jesus blurts out, "It is not right to give the children's food to the dogs!"

But this woman will not budge! She looks Jesus straight in the eye and says, "You know what? We are hungry enough that just the scraps from the table would be greatly appreciated. We do not want to take food away from others; we would simple like a small part in sharing it." And like a 2 X 4 hit to the head, Jesus gets it! What small amount of healing grace Jesus can give to this woman and her daughter is far more grace than she has ever received. This woman lives out abundant faith through the asking for the smallest of crumbs. Just give me a little faith, a little hope, a little acceptance, and I will be grateful. And from that faith, comes healing.

Through the steadfastness of her own faith in Jesus as the Son of God, her Lord, Jesus' own faith is challenged and increased. His understanding of his calling blossoms as he realizes that there is "more than enough" of God's grace to go around. God's purpose is bigger for him than he had ever imagined, and he can now never go back to that limited vision. What about you? Me? We know that there is not enough of us to go around. But, we know there is more than enough of Jesus' love, in and through us, to be part of God's grand plan for the elimination of any lines. God says, "When we grow weary, ask for moments of rejuvenation." God says, "When we grow frustrated, ask for moments of deep calm." God says, "When we become overwhelmed with all the good God calls us to do, let me come closer and give you the strength you need."

God calls us to be faithful, then pushes on the boundaries "we" set, challenging us to let go of the notion that there is not enough: not enough grace, enough food, water, forgiveness, acceptance, not enough for those "outside our lines." God, like this woman, keeps pursuing us until we finally move beyond those lines and discover it is not "us" the world needs; the world needs us to share the "more than enough" God gifts through the saving grace of Jesus" for all peoples.

In any given moment, our resources can run dry. Our monies run short. Our food supply can come close to the bottom of the barrel. But, the one thing that we will never out-use is the love of God in Jesus Christ. And, when all else really does run dry, we need hope. God's promise of daily provision, of enough, is that hope. I am convinced that when we are doing the mission and ministry to which God calls us as individuals and as a church, there will always be more than enough to feed the body and soul of those inside and outside the lines! So much "enough" that Jesus says, "Let's do away with the line thing."

When we truly understand that we are hand-picked stewards of all God has given to this world, then we will find the courage and the joy to erase those lines and invite people to come closer to the Lord who has blessed us so abundantly, that by sharing our abundance, we all have enough.

Here's the deal. God would not let Jesus pick and choose who would be on his side of the line and who would be out. Neither will God let us. And rest assured when we try, and we will, God, like this woman will push against every boundary and comfort level we have. It might make us angry. We might insist we do not have time to be bothered. We might try to ignore God's pushiness altogether, and just when we think all is back to normal, God will send some pesky, begging, frantic woman, or man, who will not go away! Then, in what we never imagined, as he or she comes closer, we will see the face that Jesus sees-not pesky, but perseverant; not begging, but believing; not frantic, but faithful. Just when others think that hope is gone and their spirits are famished, God will send them to us individuals and to the "Eastminsters" of the world, and say, "Come closer; these are your brothers and sisters in Christ."

Coming closer, Joseph and his brothers recognized each other and the bad blood between them was washed away. Their relationship was restored. By this woman coming closer, in great faith, the faith of Jesus increased beyond even his own imagination, and with every little push from God, we are promised that life in the Lord just keeps erasing those line.

Come closer. That is our invitation from the Lord. Come closer and imagine what God can do with all of our terrible, horrible, no good, very bad days! There is plenty. We need only take a little time to wait on God; then we will be prepared for the work God has for you. So do not be discouraged; you, we, can make a difference. The result may be greater than can be imagined. There is enough, and more than enough of our Lord's mercy, grace, and love to carry you. To carry me. To carry us all. Amen.