**A few years ago, I took a group of youths to the streets of Philadelphia for a week-long summer mission trip around this time of the year. We were partnering with an organization called *Broad Street Ministry*, which extends hospitality and outreach to the homeless community in Philadelphia. Not only did they feed those in need physically with hot-meals but also spiritually through worship and prayer and restoring their human dignity and respect. Ironically this took place in a Downtown facility where a Presbyterian Church once stood. That church has since been dissolved, however, under the guidance and support of the Philadelphia Presbytery, the building itself has been transformed into a mission outpost. It continues to breathe new life and hope and bear witness of what God is continuing to do in an urban ministry context.**

 **Throughout that week, we received first-hand education on a number of urban ministry issues such as poverty, homelessness, racism, prejudice, hunger, drugs and alcohols addiction that many people are facing each day….issues that most of the youths had never experienced themselves. They were more concerned about not having Internet access, TV, Air-Conditioning room, a hot-shower, or having to sleep on hard-wood floor on their sleeping bags in a gymnasium. They were really “roughing” this, as you can tell.**

 **Our very first assignment was to go around and walk the streets in our immediate vicinity and make any kind of observations. That’s right….“People Watching”! This served a couple of purposes….it helped us not only orient ourselves with our surroundings (that’s Urban survival skill 101), it also helped us confront any fears or misconceptions that we might have head-on. We trusted that God will open up our senses to see where the people sleep, hear some of the conversations, and even smell them as well, just making observations in general without direct personal engagement with them, at least not yet.**

**Because of the size of our group, we were split up into smaller groups of 4-5. If you’ve ever been to Philadelphia, or as in many urban downtown areas, you know that you don’t really need to go far to see what the “real” community. We were asked to look for any signs of injustice or “social disparity” in this world and be ready to come back and share what we saw. So off we went….**

**At first we didnt notice anything unusual about the place where we were assigned to, but soon enough, we spotted something that was a bit “unusual”. We saw a homeless man digging through the trash can looking for any leftover food that someone might have tossed out or did not finish. He reached into the garbage with his bare hand and out came a few pieces of half-eaten cheesesteak sandwich. Immediately he put it in his mouth. Then he found a few cups and cans, without hesitation he began sipping through them one-by-one. Many of us were shocked by what we saw right before our eyes….but there’s more.**

**About 20 seconds later, we noticed a middle-aged man probably in his 50's came up to the homeless man and said to him, *Hey buddy, are you hungry?”* We had no idea of what he was going to do next. So he came over, ripped out what the homeless man was trying to eat and said, *“No one should be eating out of the garbage can. Come on, Let’s Go! Let me get you something better to eat.***

**This man then proceeded to walk up to a cheesesteak stand at the food court, ordered a cheesesteak sandwich and a drink for this homeless man. With slight hesitation, the homeless person accepted the cheesesteak with deep gratitude and thanks. Well, at the very least, he knew he would NOT go to sleep hungry that night, but then the next question is, where? Without being robbed or harassed by others or by the police.**

**In light of the story that we’ve been studying over the past couple of weeks, about the Feeding of the 5,000 and with the overabundance of God’s blessing that we are to share with others, there are still many people in this world who are struggling to find their next meal, while others are still squandering food and drinkable water away. Even the dogs” look for the crumbs that were being scattered off the masters table.**

**In the passage that we just read from Matthew, Jesus was traveling along with his disciples into the Gentile territory. Jesus and many of His disciples were now “minorities” where they were heading. Suddenly Jesus was being confronted by a Canaanite woman, perhaps she had been following him for quite some time and has listened and believed in His teaching. Many of these Gentiles were considered inferior or “dirty” in the eyes of the Jews and they would avoid them whenever possible. Obviously when this Canaanite woman approached Jesus, the disciples knew right away that they needed to protect Jesus away from her. *Get out of the way, woman, Dont you know who this man is? Hes the Messiah, the Son of God. Hes got better things to do than talking to some Gentile woman.***

**The more the disciples tried to shoo her away, the more she cried out, *Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me!*, this time using his proper title known for their long-awaiting Jewish Messiah, she’s using a term that was exclusively among the Jews. Jesus did not respond to her cry right away. It could’ve been that Jesus didn’t hear her (maybe or maybe not) or perhaps He chose not to respond to her in public without disclosing her true identity and shaming her background.**

**After a while Jesus finally broke his silence. For this woman came not to plead for herself but rather for her demon possessed daughter back home. After hearing her request, Jesus responded back to her saying, *I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel. Its not right to take the childrens bread and toss it to the dogs.***

Obviously we cannot take Jesus’s response quite literally but rather metaphorically. It raised serious questions about justice, divine election and mercy to God’s people. Who really are the ones to be fed? Is it only for those who are elite and “chosen” children of God? Or I thought the feasting around the table is opened to ALL of God’s children.

But despite the harsh remark, this Canaanite woman was determined not go home disappointed. She knew exactly what she was looking for and whom she was dealing with. She responded back to Jesus saying, ***but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from the Masters table.***

Very rarely do we see Jesus being challenged by someone like that…needless to say, from a Gentile Canaanite woman. Jesus commended this Canaanite womans persistent courage and her extraordinary faith. ***What great faith!”*** He proclaimed, “***Let it be done for her as she wishes***.

This simple encounter between Jesus and this Canaanite woman revealed much more than a simple request by the woman of healing her daughter. It shed light upon the greater implication of whos really IN and who’s really OUT? Who are the dogs that the crumbs are being scattered upon at the Masters table?

Through this passage we also saw the courage of the Canaanite woman who daringly challenged the status quo and the social norms. She broke all kinds of boundaries - ethnicity, heritage, religion, gender, and social status. She was also the mother of a demon-possessed child…so technically made her spiritually unclean as well.

But through this divine encounter with the Canaanite woman, God sent a prophetic message to both the Jewish audience, as well as to the Gentiles that **this NEW Kingdom of Heaven is no longer socially or geographically defined, but rather it is based upon one’s faith and God’s unconditional grace. It is no longer exclusive due to one’s lineage as children of Abraham but an open invitation to all who come and profess their faith in Christ.**

Regrettably we have continued to see more evidence of crumbs being scattered around and a fellow human being treated like dogs in our society day-in and day-out. From the rising racial and social tension outside of St. Louis this week, as we saw on the news, to the persecution and humanitarian crisis of the ethnic and religious minorities in Northern Iraq, to the on-going hostility and animosity between Israel and Palestine, people are struggling to co-exist with their own neighbors.

**We, as humanity, have failed to live out God’s vision of the Kingdom of Heaven.** Instead of sharing the bread with one another, we have exploited our privileges and resources by taking them away from others, redistributing and throwing the crumbs at the “dogs” or even worse. We’ve built up invisible “curtains” that disguise the shame of humanity and prevent God’s love to be permeated to ALL of God’s people. Human decency needs to be respected and restored. Peace and love shall prevail over hate and act of aggression. There are still more work that needs to be done in order to restore this vision of the Kingdom of Heaven here on earth.

Jesus proclaimed that throughout the gospel, we are all part of the same family. We are all broken people, separated from God by our own human sins, but we have been restored by God’s grace through the self-giving of Christ on the cross. The Master’s table has been prepared and there are enough rooms for others to share. *There is one Lord, one baptism. There are neither Jews nor Gentiles, rich or poor, male or female, for we are all one in Christ Jesus.*

Like the Feeding of the 5,000, **this passage is more than just about the physical feeding but rather about the spiritual feeding. It’s not about who, what and how we are to be fed, but that a reservation has already been made and an open invitation has been sent out to ALL who wish to come and be fed.**

Friends, Gods mercy and compassion are sufficient for all of us to share. Within the sovereignty of God, no one shall be eating the crumbs off the floor or out of the garbage can (ever again) but ALL shall be dining and feasting with a full loaf of bread at the LORD’s table. Through the faithful gathering and distribution of the 12 baskets full of leftovers, those who are still hungry **will** be filled and satisfied and those who are still thirsty **will** be quenched. As disciples of Christ, all of us have been commissioned and sent to **live out this radical hospitality and embracing the love of Christ with all those who come and believe**.

In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, Amen.