**A few years ago, I took a group of high school and college youths for a week-long summer mission trip on the streets of Philadelphia. The purpose of our mission trip was to learn more about urban issues such as poverty, hunger, homelessness, drugs and alcohol addictions, domestic violence and abuses, just to name a few.**

**One of the goals of our mission trip was to see the world through a different lens, from a different perspective…of those who are less privileged and less fortunate than we are. This also include self-discovery and learning while overcoming some of our personal fears, biases and prejudices upon those who might be different from us.**

 **Throughout that week, we received hands-on training and education by visiting various organizations that provided assistance to those who are struggling and living on the margins of society. We didn’t stay in a hotel, but instead we slept on the hard floor of a fellowship hall of a former church in Downtown Philadelphia. We had no access to TV, no WiFi and no Air-Conditioning. Keep in mind that this was in the middle of July also. So it’s hot and humid everyday!!! We did, however, make arrangement to take turn to shower in a nearby gym that graciously allowed us to use their facilities. Talk about privileges that we often take for granted. This was all part of our learning experience as well.**

**One of our very first assignments was to take a walk on the streets and to make observations about who and what’s around us. That’s right....“People Watching”! So we split ourselves up into smaller groups of 4-5, for our safety sake and also try not draw too much attentions as we tried to blend in with the neighborhood. Our task was to looking for signs of social “injustice” or economic “disparity” among the people whom we come across. It didn’t take long for us to spot one, as my group was assigned to go to the Reading Terminal Market, a famous downtown tourist spot, kind of like South Street Seaport.**

**From a distance, we spotted a homeless man digging through the trash can of a food court looking for any leftover food that someone might have tossed out or didn’t finish. He reached into the garbage with his bare hand and out came a few pieces of half-eaten cheesesteak sandwiches. Immediately he put it in his mouth. Then he found a few cans and cups with some leftover drinks or ice from the garbage, without hesitation he began sipping through them one-by-one. Many of us were shocked by what we saw….but wait, there was more.**

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

**This man then proceeded to order a cheesesteak sandwich for the homeless man. With little hesitation, the homeless man graciously accepted the cheesesteak. Well, at the very least, he knew he would NOT go to sleep hungry that night, but then the next question is, where would he sleep? Under the bridge, inside the subway, by the bus depot, or simply off the sidewalk?**

**A couple of weeks ago, we were studying the passage on the *Feeding of the 5,000*. Remember? We learned about how God was challenging us to share the God’s abundance of blessings with others, especially those who are less fortunate and less privileged that we are. Sadly but truthfully, there are still many people in this world, like that homeless man, who do not know where their next meal may come, while others (including us) are throwing food away. Even the “dogs” still need to eat and sometimes by scavenging for the crumbs that were being tossed at the master’s table.**

**In the passage that we just read earlier from the gospel of Matthew, Jesus and the disciples were being confronted by a Gentile woman – a Canaanite nevertheless. She had probably been following Jesus for quite some time and was looking for the right moment to approach him. In the eyes of the Jews, the Gentiles were considered the inferior race because they were not part of God’s chosen people, so when this Canaanite woman approached Jesus, the disciples immediately were trying to shoo her away while protecting Jesus away from her. “*Get out of the way, woman! Don’t you know who this man is? You obviously are in the wrong place. Go back to where you belong!”***

**But this Canaanite woman wasn’t going to take a NO for an answer. The more the disciples tried to get rid of her, the more she persisted! “*Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me!”* she cried out.**

**This time she used the title “Son of David” that was used primarily among the Jews. You wouldn’t expect to hear that from a Gentile woman. Jesus did not respond to her cry right away…not sure if he didn’t hear her or was he trying to ignore her.**

**This woman, who was never identified by name nor do we know who her husband was…that is IF she had a husband, came not to plead for herself but instead, she came to advocate for her demon possessed daughter who was too bedridden to come with her. She came to plea for Jesus’s healing mercy. After hearing her request, Jesus finally broke his silence and responded back to her saying, “*I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel. It’s not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to the dogs.”*** Whoa, did Jesus really say that? What did he mean by that?

Obviously, I don’t think we can take Jesus’s response quite literally referring to this Canaanite woman as a “dog”. Nevertheless, this woman represented the “other” people…those who were marginalized by our culture, society, or by tradition whether intentionally or unintentionally. She was being treated like a dog! Give credit to this woman, who had the boldness and courage to challenge the system of injustice of society. In today’s term, some might even consider her as a rebel or even a counter-protester like Heather Heyer, who was killed last week down in Charlottesville, VA. We can call her whatever we want, but God was using this Canaanite woman’s advocacy in order to raise our awareness of issues that no one dare to challenge. **God revealed to us a whole new thinking concerning the systems of social injustice, as well as God’s divine will and plan of salvation for ALL of God’s people, not just those who consider themselves as elite or the superior race**.

Despite Jesus’s harsh criticism on this Canaanite woman, she was determined NOT to go home empty-handed. She knew exactly what she was looking for, and whom she was dealing with. She had the gut to confront and challenge Jesus by saying, ***“but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from the Master’s table.”* Wow!**

Very rarely do we see Jesus being challenged by someone like that, maybe with the exception of the Pharisees. But from a Gentile woman? Jesus must be embarrassed. But instead of reprimanding her, Jesus commended her of her persistence, courage and extraordinary faith. He acknowledged her publicly by proclaiming “***What great faith! Let it be done for her as she wishes.”***

This encounter between Jesus and this Canaanite woman revealed much more than a simple request for healing of the woman’s daughter. It shed light upon us **who’s really IN** and **who’s really OUT in the Kingdom of God? Who are considered the privileged and the under-privileged?** Who are the “dogs” scavenging the crumbs that are being scattered at the Master’s table?

Through this divine encounter with the Canaanite woman, God sent a prophetic message to both the Jews, as well as to the Gentiles that **this NEW Kingdom of Heaven is no longer defined by who we are but by what we believe and profess in our faith. It is based upon God’s unconditional grace available to us ALL and not just a few of those elite and “chosen” ones. The invitation to this heavenly banquet is wide opened and it’s extended to all who wish to come, see and taste.**

Despite of the many effort and progress that has been made over the years, we still see many crumbs being tossed at the dogs in our society day-in and day-out. Certainly we do not need to look far to see evidence of this, all we have to do is turn on the news. Human beings are still consumed by our own sinfulness and prejudices of various levels and forms, some are more extreme and radical than the others. We carry hatred and fear among us when we are being confronted with people who is different from our own. We manipulate and suppress the power of others in order to elevate our status in this “dog-eat-dog” world, claiming to be more superior over the others. **But this is NOT the message of the gospel nor is it God’s vision of the Kingdom that is already here and is yet to come.** Christ has challenged us to uphold a higher moral standard as reconcilers, healers, and ambassadors of this sinful and imperfect world.

**As part of this human race, we acknowledge that we 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 and throwing the crumbs at those whom we consider as “dogs”. We’ve built up these invisible “curtains” that disguise the shame of humanity and prevent God’s love to be permeated through us ALL. Human decency needs to be respected and restored. The last shall be first and the first shall be last. It is then and only then when peace and love can prevail over hate and act of aggression.

Friends, God’s 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 instead ALL shall be welcomed and be feasting at the LORD’s table.

**Let us not be blinded by the eclipse of our sins, but instead, be illuminated by the light of the Son Jesus Christ – a light that would outshine all the other lights in our world yesterday, today, and tomorrow, until Christ returns once again.**

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