Title: *It’s the Dog’s Turn* Homecrest PC

Scripture: *James 2:1-10* and Mark 7:24-379/9/18

In the opening scene of the movie *Crazy Rich Asians,* a young Singaporean businesswoman named Eleanor Young walked into a five-star hotel in London, England along with two of her young children and her sister. She approached the front desk, informing the clerk that she had a reservation for the *Presidential Suite* for the evening. With much disbelief, the clerk gave her a surprise frowned upon their looks and drew to a conclusion that they probably had gotten the wrong address of their hotel. He told Eleanor that this hotel is a luxurious hotel and is for “very special” guests ONLY. The clerk then requested Eleanor and her family to leave the hotel premise immediately.

Having been humiliated and shamed by the hotel front desk clerk, Eleanor then demanded to see the manager of the hotel to straighten this whole confusion. Little did the hotel manager know who Eleanor Young was, he even threatened to call the police if they did not leave the property immediately. He made it clear that they were NOT welcomed in this 5-star hotel and that obviously they were in a place where they did not belong.

This confrontation went on back and forth between the hotel clerk, the manager, and the persistent Eleanor. Without much avail, Eleanor eventually went to make a telephone call, then a few minutes later, an older English man came down through the hotel elevator and greeted Eleanor and her family warmly with a big hug. The old man immediately ordered the hotel manager to bring lady Eleanor and her family’s luggage to the *Presidential Suite*. Without saying a word, Eleanor began walking towards the elevator and then suddenly she paused and turned around and commanded the hotel manager to be careful with their luggage. The old English man demanded that the hotel manager to apologize to lady Eleanor because soon, the very same hotel will be sold to the Young family from Singapore. That’s right, she would soon be their new boss!!!

In the Gospel reading that we just read earlier from Mark, we also came across a story related to **social stereotype**, **classism,** **entitlement** and **privilege**. Through the eyes of a Syro-Phoenician woman – who was a Gentile living in a region near the modern day Syria, just north of the Sea of Galilee, we get a sense of the social dynamic during that time when people from different regions and classes of people coming together.

We don’t know much about the background of this Syro-Phoenician woman. It seems as though this Gentile woman had planned this encounter with Jesus for quite some time with great resolve. She knew her place in society as a Gentile AND also as a woman, but she was also a woman on a mission and with great persistence and determination. She knew exactly what they needed to ask of Jesus and she was determined NOT to ready home empty-handed. The main objective of this woman’s mission was to ask Jesus to heal her demon possessed daughter who was at home. She didn’t asked Jesus to go with her. She had confidence and faith that if Jesus had only spoken the word, that her daughter would be healed.

Now you think that Jesus would fully comply to her request, right? But to our amazement, Jesus gave her a “cold shoulder”. He brushed her right off. He even called her a very nasty name. He referred her as a DOG!!! **“*Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs.”*** Jesus said.Whoa,did Jesus really say that? Did Jesus really call this Gentile woman a dog? And what exactly did he mean by that?

No one likes to be called a “dog” regardless of what culture you were raised in, but calling someone a “dog” was an ultimate insult then, and as it is even today. But this Gentile woman was persistent and had pretty thick skin. She probably had been called much harsher name than a dog before. She had the guts to respond back to Jesus saying, ***“even the dogs get the crumbs that are tossed from the master’s tables.”***

This simple exchange between Jesus and this Gentile woman told us a lot about the dynamic between the Jews and the Gentiles at the time, as well as the many challenges that the early Christians had to overcome....dealing with different classes and different cultures of people. There were multiple layers of stereotypes, cultural and social challenges and boundaries that they needed to overcome. Throughout the Bible, the Jews have been considered the “entitled” or the “chosen” people of God. They were the inheritors of God’s promise due to their lineage passing down from generation to generations. It was all within their rights to claim what were “entitled” to them. These were THEIR breads and no one else would dare to challenge them or to compete with them.

But this Syro-Phoenician woman **was persistent with her request. She was definitely not afraid to speak her mind or to challenge the higher authority and the existing unjust social structure.** She could definitely bark like a dog and refused to let go down without a fight. ***“Even the dogs still got to eat, don’t they? Don’t they even deserve the crumbs that fell on the floor by the children?”***

But this woman demanded more than just the crumbs, she wanted more! She wanted the full access to the bread AND a place to sit at the table, alongside with the master and the “privileged” children.

This story, I believe, not only served as a pivotal point in Jesus’ ministry but served microcosmically of the entire gospel narrative. It opened up a whole new world of thinking about who we are, whose we are, and ultimately who rightfully belongs in the Kingdom of God? **Through the faith of this Gentile woman, we catch a sneak preview of the Kingdom of God – a kingdom that everyone is expected to be a part of and not just among the few chosen elites.**

Through the work that Christ had done on the cross, the door to the Kingdom of God is now wide opened and is made available to ALL who believe in God’s saving grace. The same loaf of bread must now be shared among ALL of God’s children and…yes, even with the dogs. Through the woman’s persistence, she kept knocking and earned herself an invitation to the “heavenly banquet”.

Come to think of it, this scenario can very well play out in our place and in our world today. We may find ourselves fighting for a place to eat alongside the table with the rest of the dogs, or we might find ourselves shooing away those whom we think seemingly do not belong in their places?

As many of you know, there seems to be an alarming trend that this country has been torn by series of confrontations among different races and classes of citizens. Instead of striving toward a common goal and discovering our unique calling and places in society, we find ourselves being polarized based upon our differences. The debate even lapses into how we relate and treat one another concerning who truly belongs and who must be turned away from this country.

Even within the church setting, we often find ourselves not being treated in the same level playing field. Some churches may receive more attentions over the others while some slip through the crack and fall off the radar and neglect to fail. To certain degrees, our churches are still very much divided among those who “have” and those who “have-not”, the tall-steeple “Avenue” churches and churches that are struggling to pay their bills or even their staff. On one hand, we claim that we worship the same God, follow the same tradition, sing the same hymns, and serve the same church of Jesus Christ, and even eat from the same bread. “***Even the dogs under the table deserve to eat the children’s crumbs.”***

Unfortunately due to our past neglect, we still live in a society where **communities are still being defined based upon our differences, rather than through what we have in common among ourselves.** We’ve built up these visible and invisible “boundaries” upon our races, ethnicities, languages, genders, educational, or economic status, or even theological interpretations and understandings. These boundaries often divide us, as a church, instead of uniting us. One may only ponder, “**Where is God in the midst of all of this? Are we still talking about the same heaven and the same Kingdom of God?”**

In the other passage that we read earlier, the writer of James continues to reiterate the theme of practice what we preach…of how we must live out our faith, as we talked about last week. James is the **Gospel for the Everyday Living.** It offered us advices on how we ought to treat one another – **to love our neighbor as ourselves and to show no partiality among God’s children**. James is calling all Christ followers to **live up to a higher standard** - the standard of *agape* or divine love[[1]](#footnote-1) instead of self-serving and self-promoting love. This love, as Christ demonstrated to us, shall cast out all of our fears and breaks down all barriers. It is this love that would prevail and bring us all closer together…so that one day we may all feast around the same table and eat the same bread together. Our faith alone is not enough to save us. Faith must be accompanied by our actions hand-in-hand. Our faith, without action, is dead!

Through the saving grace of God, we know that God has prepared a place for us at the heavenly banquet table. Our mission is to make sure that we “get in” but to extend the same invitation to others to the very same table. Let us make room for those as well. There will always be enough bread for everyone who desires to be fed. Let us keep our elbows off the tables, take our bags off the chairs next to us, so that others may come in and share this heavenly feast that God has prepared for ALL. No one shall be eating the crumbs that are thrown off the floor or to go to bed hungry anymore.

Friends, **the kingdom of heaven is ready for all of us to partake and to share with others.** Ultimately we are not being judged by our merits or our lineage, but by the fruits that we bear through our faith in Jesus Christ. Thanks be to God.

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

1. Smith, Archie *Feasting on the Word*  Year B, Volume 4, P.42 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)