

# Bread Enough

*Sermon by Bob Arbogast*

*Celebration Fellowship, Ionia, Michigan*

*April 1 & 2, 2019*

**Scripture: Mark 7:24-30**

## Sermon

The story we just listened to is a puzzle. It doesn't fit with our usual picture of Jesus. Jesus is compassionate. Jesus is merciful. But not this time. What are we supposed to make of that?

+

A woman, a Gentile, comes to Jesus. She's desperate. Because her little girl is in big trouble. (It's a demon!) She explains it all to Jesus, and she begs him to help. But Jesus doesn't seem to care. He tells the woman to buzz off.

Yes, Jesus helps the woman in the end. But she almost has to shame him into it! It's a puzzle for sure. Again, what are we supposed to make of it?

JESUS DOES OFFER A SORT-OF EXPLANATION. He says it isn't right to take bread away from children and use it to feed hungry dogs. Ouch! Did he just call the woman and her little girl dogs? Because they're not Jews? That doesn't give us the warm fuzzies about Jesus! Not at all. But it does fit the bigger picture.

+

In Matthew 10, Jesus sends his disciples out to announce the Kingdom. He tells them to heal the sick and to cast out demons. He also tells them, "Don't go to Gentiles. And don't go to Samaritans. Just go to Jews."

Now, that's not racism. And it's not a lack of compassion. No; it's all about focus. It's all about focussing on the mission that was entrusted to Jesus by the Father. In a starving world, the Father sent Jesus to feed the children of Israel. In a world gone astray, the Father sent Jesus to find the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

IN TONIGHT'S STORY, JESUS IS FOCUSED ON THAT TASK. And he's not about to be distracted. He's not about to use up valuable and limited resources, he's not about to use himself up, on Gentiles. That's not his mission. He has come for the children of Israel.

Yet Jesus isn't blind in his focus. So he winds up helping the woman and her little girl. And in the very next story, which takes place smack in the middle of Gentile terri-

tory, Jesus heals a man who can't hear or speak. He heals the man, and he heals him right away. No complaining about dogs taking food away from children.

So, yes, Jesus is focused. But you do get the sense that sometimes he can't help himself.

+

In this week's reading, did you notice what happens when Jesus visits Nazareth? He gets a chilly reception. The hometown folks have no faith in Jesus at all. "And because of their unbelief, he can't do any miracles among them." That's what Mark says. But that's not all he says. He says, "Jesus can't do any miracles among them *except* to place his hands on a few sick people and heal them."

So he can't do any . . . except for a few. It's as if Jesus can't help himself. He has come to make things right. That includes making people whole. And that's just what he does wherever he is and whoever needs him, even if that means his focus on the children of Israel gets a little blurry.

ACTUALLY, HELPING THOSE GENTILES FITS PERFECTLY with Jesus' focus on Israel. And it fits because Jesus was sent to Israel for the sake of the whole world. And even though Jesus is focussed on Israel, the whole world is always in view.

For God so loved the *world*. Because the whole world was lost, not just sheep from the house of Israel. Because the whole world was hungry, not just the children of Israel.

The whole world was in need of blessing. And God had promised that blessing. And that blessing would come through Jesus. So even though it's not what Jesus is focused on, it's no surprise when blessing spills over to Gentiles.

NOW, I'VE BEEN TRYING TO FIGURE OUT what all of this means for the church. To begin with, certainly the church has a mission. And that mission has a focus. In John 20, Jesus says, "As the Father sent me, so I am sending you."

Jesus was sent to bring the Kingdom to Israel. Jesus was sent to call Israel back to God. With the Spirit's power, Jesus was sent to be what Israel could never be, a faithful house of God. Jesus embodied perfect faithfulness all the way to death.

Jesus sends the church on a mission of its own. The church is sent to announce the Kingdom to the world. The church is sent to call the world back to God. With the Spirit's power, the church is sent to be what the world can never be, a faithful house of God. The church embodies the faithfulness of Jesus, even when that faithfulness leads to death. And the focus of the church's mission is as wide as the world!

NOW, IN CASE YOU FEEL OVERWHELMED BY THAT, let me offer you two encouragements. First of all, always remember that the church is one, holy, catholic, and apostolic. What I mean is, the church is not just the few of us here in this place. So the whole mission of the church is not our responsibility. Not at all.

In fact, I don't think it would be wrong for Celebration Fellowship as a church to focus our mission on the world that's inside the fences. Let's announce and let's embody the Good News of the Kingdom to that world.

HERE'S THE SECOND ENCOURAGEMENT. There is no shortage of bread. There is no shortage of bread. When Jesus is talking to the Gentile woman, he makes it sound like a zero-sum game. "If I give bread to you, that will mean less bread for the children." But that's not how it is in the Kingdom of God.

+

You see, Mark gives us two stories, one shortly before and one shortly after Jesus talks with the Gentile woman. In the first story, 5,000 men, plus women and children, are fed to the full using five small loaves of bread and some fish. And there are twelve baskets full of leftovers. In the second story, 4,000 men, plus women and children, are fed to the full using seven small loaves of bread. And there are seven baskets of leftovers.

FOR THE WORK JESUS WAS SENT TO DO, there is no shortage of resources. For the hungry, there is plenty of bread. For the sick, there is plenty of healing. For the sinful, there is plenty of forgiveness.

And for the work the church is sent to do, there are plenty of resources. Knowledge. Compassion. Time. Money. Prayer. And all of these resources are rooted in love. And love is not a zero-sum resource.

+

When our daughter Katie was born. Jan & I loved her so much. And we showed her that love every way we could. But that didn't take away from the love we had for each other. No; it was a brand new supply of love.

When our daughter Kristi was born three years later, we loved her every way we could. But that didn't take away from the love we had for Katie. No; it was another brand new supply of love.

Eight years later, our daughter Martha was born. And all of a sudden there was another supply of love, more love than we had ever imagined.

+

That's how the love of God is. God sends Jesus to Israel in love. And that love is more than enough. Jesus sends the church to the world in love. And that love is more than enough.

Along with that love, Jesus gives us everything we need. So let's love the world inside the fences.

+

And to God be the glory.

+