

September 9, 2018 Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost
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Peace Lutheran Church - Austin, Texas

Today the Scriptures...from Proverbs and James to the gospel of Mark... bring us words about the ones who are hungry and forgotten...and can often only hope for crumbs... in a world where so many others are able to feast.

As we reflect on how our faith calls us to live in such a world, on this national day of service in our denomination, it is very fitting that we would have a distinguished guest and ministry partner here today. For 15 years, Mary Catherine Hinds has been among the leadership of Church World Service, which has been holding CROP Hunger Walks across the country since 1969 to raise money to end hunger. We are honored to have her with us, and I believe she would like to have a chance to offer some words.

...Remarks from Mary Catherine Hinds...

Thank you so much for your message and your work, Mary Catherine. It is our privilege to be in ministry with you and so many others across the world through Church World Service. As I mentioned, this is also a national day of service in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America...and so after second service today, we will have the chance to assemble care kits, Bags of Peace, for neighbors we encounter on the street. And there may even still be spaces available helping sort clothing at St. Thomas Moore to share with friends we visit with the Mobile Loaves, and Fishes truck. What a day to hear about caring for the hungry.

I mean...it almost seems like we almost don't even need to hear it, right? We've got this caring lark down pat.

But...it doesn't quite work like that, does it? We aren't counting up gold stars...racing for the moral dessert that we earn for eating all our ethical vegetables. It's a bit more complicated than that. Because there is always someone hungry, always someone forgotten, not cared for as well as they should be...even by us. And depending on how we read Mark's gospel today...maybe even also by Jesus...

The early chapters of Mark carried on at a break-neck pace...but by the time we find Jesus today...he has gathered many admirers...but also enemies...in fact...he seems to have decided to take some time away to slow down and regroup here in Mark's seventh chapter.

Today we hear how he "set out and went away" to the region of Tyre. Away...from the crowds...away from...perhaps...the danger...that felt closer and more ominous than before. Away, perhaps to regroup, to recover, to re-strategize...Away to pray. But make no mistake...when Mark tells us that he went out to Tyre...he wants us to know...Jesus is going away...away from the center of things.

It is here that Jesus is in a house, hoping for solitude. And it is in this house, that he is somehow found out. And it is into this house, that the Syrophenician woman whose name we do not know, finds him. She pleads with him...because even though Jesus hasn't had time to catch his breath...neither have this woman or her daughter. They have been gasping and grasping for just enough to survive each moment for...we don't even know how long.

It is here that Jesus says words that are frankly appalling...insulting...dismissive. Is he too tired...too sad...to summon compassion at first glance? This does not sound like the Jesus we know.

But...these edges to which Jesus has come are her turf. He has just been rejected, but she has learned her way of dealing with rejection and being cast out for...who know how long. So, when Jesus calls her a dog, she's ready. She calls him the crumbs under the table of the Israelite children.

Who knows if she knew that he came here because he needed time to redraw the path of his ministry? Maybe she'd heard about how powerful he was. Maybe she'd also heard about the knives being sharpened for him back at home. Maybe she called him crumbs because if he was so important there, there was no way he'd be here...where she was.

And, it seems, in that moment....that Jesus changes his mind...that his mission comes into sharp relief again.

Perhaps her words shake him from his fog and he looks up, delighted at the woman who is too in love with her daughter to do anything but persist in the face of being made to feel small again. She knew that her life...that her daughter's life...mattered. And she told Jesus so. And when she did, Jesus not only gave her what she needed more than anything in the world...he also seems to have redraw before our eyes the lines of his whole mission. He marches out of that house and to the center of the Gentile world – the Decapolis – to heal the deaf man. And in offering healing and the ability to hear to this man, he makes it clear that he intends to allow *all* people to hear the good news of the kingdom...

Today we have heard the call to share our bread generously with the poor, and be blessed. We have heard James' hard proclamation that our prayers for the poor and hungry mean nothing when we don't offer what we can to meet their material needs. Today we have heard thanks for work done before...even though we know there are still so many hungry today.

We give thanks to God for Church World Service, for the CROP Walk, for Hill Country Community Ministries, Bags of Peace, and Mobile Loaves and Fishes...for all these ministries that are part of our lives...AND...and...we ask God for the strength to carry on with the work as much and as long as we can. The work of the kingdom was here to do before we were born...and no matter how hard we work, it will still be here at the end of our lives. We do not do it because it is ours to complete...but because we have seen today that Christ has drawn the circle of God's concern so wide, that we can always reach out to a fellow child of God in love...In fact, apart from the sacraments, this may be the closest we come to touching our faith...to touching that in which we believe most deeply...to touching the very face of God.

A line of the Mishnah says it better than I know how: Do not be daunted by the enormity of the world's grief. Do justly, now. Love mercy, now. Walk humbly

now. You are not obligated to complete the work, but neither are you free to abandon it. (*Pirkei Avot 2*)

So the work continues. God's work, Our Hands. Amen.