

Sermon August 16, 2026

Matthew 15:10-28

Then he called the crowd to him and said to them, "Listen and understand: it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but it is what comes out of the mouth that defiles." Then the disciples approached and said to him, "Do you know that the Pharisees took offense when they heard what you said?" He answered, "Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted. Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind. And if one blind person guides another, both will fall into a pit." But Peter said to him, "Explain this parable to us." Then he said, "Are you also still without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth enters the stomach and goes out into the sewer? But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this is what defiles. For out of the heart come evil intentions, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a person, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile."

Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon." But he did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, "Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us." He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me." He answered, "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." Then Jesus answered her, "Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish." And her daughter was healed from that moment.

Gathering the Crumbs of Compassion

Some stories begin with abundance. Baskets overflow, the sea parts, the bush burns. But today's Gospel begins with... crumbs.

Crumbs of compassion. Crumbs of courage. Crumbs of hope.

And sometimes crumbs are all a person has. Sometimes crumbs are all that's left because the full feast was reserved for someone else.

But here's the Gospel truth: God builds miracles out of crumbs; God builds community out of what others call "not enough."

Joseph's story is soaked in betrayal. He has been sold, abandoned, forgotten. Wrongfully accused and thrown into prison. It must have felt like his life was over before it even began. But the Pharaoh's vivid dreams and Joseph's creative problem-solving give him a second chance. And his brothers get a second chance too, even though they are the ones who betrayed him. When Joseph reveals himself, he weeps so loudly that the whole household hears it. This is not quiet reconciliation or polite forgiveness. This is compassion that emerges from truth-telling, from naming harm, from refusing to pretend everything is fine.

Joseph gathers the crumbs of compassion for a family that nearly destroyed him and somehow... miraculously turns them into a feast of reconciliation.

Not because the harm was small, but because God's compassion is large. And God's compassion extends to the Canaanite woman.

She cries out for help. She is desperate. She is persistent. She is loud. And she is ignored.

The disciples want her gone. She is disruptive and they want her to be quiet... to be silenced. And Jesus does not respond the way we expect him to... at least at first. I am always surprised at his response because it feels out of character. Instead of an extravagant welcome, he dismisses the woman because of her ethnicity, her gender, and her outsider status. She is treated the way women have been treated in countless religious traditions—including our own.

She is offered crumbs... but she gathers them up with courage.

"Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table."

She refuses to be silenced and dismissed. She won't be left behind. She persists, even though speaking up to a religious leader is difficult.

And it works! Jesus listens. And then Jesus learns and changes. Jesus expands the circle.

Her voice becomes the turning point. Her persistence becomes the miracle. Her courage becomes the teaching. And even Jesus learns a valuable lesson. This unnamed woman gathers the crumbs of compassion and turns them into a feast of faith.

And we need this story of persistence and faith. Too many faith traditions have also silenced women... pushed them aside as they toss a handful of stale crumbs.

My stepmother, Annie, grew up in the Catholic Church. She always felt a calling to the priesthood but was denied this path simply because she is a woman. Despite the fact that the number of men graduating from seminary is declining, there has not been a path to the priesthood for women. Instead, they are guided to other lives of services: as nuns or teachers or musicians. And yet, Annie continued to feel the urgent pull of her calling and refused to settle for crumbs.

I thought about her recently when another denomination, the Southern Baptist Convention, voted to ban churches with women pastors or who allow women to preach. I want you to think about this, as a congregation who has called and supported many female pastors. I want you to think about how two of the largest Christian denominations actively work to silence women.

These are not small things. These are wounds we wear...burdens we carry. These are crumbs offered where a feast should be.

And like the Canaanite woman, women have cried out— not quietly, not politely, but persistently, courageously, prophetically.

And like the disciples, churches have often responded: "Send her away. She keeps shouting."

But here is the Gospel truth: *Jesus listens to the voices the world tries to silence. Jesus lifts the people the world tries to dismiss. Jesus learns from the women the world tries to ignore.*

The Canaanite woman teaches Jesus what compassion looks like when someone has been denied a seat at the table.

She gathers the crumbs and shows us they are enough to change the world.

And millions of women inherit her story. Annie chose to find a new path. She discovered an independent Catholic organization called Roman Catholic Women priests. She found a home and a group of faithful Jesus followers who welcomed her calling. She was ordained with several women from around the country. Each spoke at the service of their difficult journeys: pushed away by priests, guided to positions that did not fit their calling. All of the women I watched that day were past retirement age... but each had finally found a place to follow and honor our God. They were silenced no more!

Today we are called to look at what are we carrying and how we will carry it together.

We carry wounds from our families... wounds that sometimes extend back for generations of trauma. We carry traditions and systems that need to be re-examined in the light of the gospel. We carry stories of exclusion that need to be named. We carry voices that have been silenced and must now be heard.

We carry the truth that God's presence is found in compassion. God builds miracles out of crumbs; God builds community out of what others call "not enough." And God calls us to gather compassion until every person has a place at the table.

Thanks be to God. Amen.