

Children

This is a difficult text even for adults. In order to help the children make some sense out of it, I have brought a saltine cracker in a baggie. I begin by asking the kids, "Do you know what a crumb is?" No one is sure enough to describe a crumb to me, so I take the baggie with the cracker out of my pocket, hold it up and ask, "Is this a crumb?"

"No!" I am told, "It's a cracker!"

"That's right. It's a cracker. But what if I do this...?" With those words I crush the cracker (still in the baggie to contain the crumbs). "Now," I continue, holding up the crunched pieces, "do I still have a cracker?"

"No, you have a bag of crumbs."

"Aha!" I respond. "So, now we know what a crumb is. It's a piece of something -- a very small piece. Crumbs are what is left on your plate when you finish eating a piece of cake. Crumbs are what fall off the loaf when the bread is broken during communion. Crumbs are the little parts no one really misses or cares about, except ... I wonder, do any of you have a pet?"

Many of the children indicate with nods that they do, so I begin asking what these pets might be. As luck would have it, every single one of the children present has a cat. Being particularly fond of cats myself, this would normally not be a problem. But this morning, in view of the lectionary text, we obviously needed to talk about dogs. "Do any of you have a friend who has a dog?" Several children indicate they do.

"Are these dogs allowed to come in the house?" Again, the response is affirmative. "Well, if one of these dogs was in the house while the family was eating dinner and if a crumb of food dropped off the table to the floor, what do you suppose would happen to the crumb?"

"The dog would eat it!" comes the instant reply.

"Yes," I agree, "that's what I think would happen too. Now, we've already seen that a crumb is a very small piece of something, so small that usually no one wants it. But we weren't thinking about dogs. Sometimes dogs are very happy to have the crumbs from our tables -- the scraps no one else wants.

"We're talking about this today because of a conversation Jesus had with a woman who asked him for some help. Jesus told her, 'It's not right for me to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs.' Then the woman replied, 'Even the dogs get to eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table.'

"What she meant by saying that to him was that she didn't need very much. All she was asking for was what no one else would want or miss -- just a crumb. So Jesus gave her what she needed.

"You know, sometimes we have things in our lives we don't want -- not crumbs exactly, but toys we don't play with anymore, clothes we've grown out of and don't wear anymore, things we might throw away that someone else might use. Things that seem like trash to us may be a real treasure to someone else. This story about Jesus and the woman tells us we need to be aware of how little it takes sometimes to fill another's need; sometimes just a few crumbs are enough."

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In 1797, prominent German author Johann Wolfgang von Goethe wrote a poem called "Der Zauberlehrling," in which an apprentice of a master sorcerer is left alone with chores to do. Invoking magic that he was not yet properly trained to use, the apprentice commanded a bucket and broom to do his work. Because he could not properly control them, everything got quickly out of hand, and chaos ensued. Finally, the master returned and restored order to the mess. Walt Disney famously employed the plot of the poem in his musical "Fantasia," starring Mickey Mouse as the "Sorcerer's Apprentice."

While we laugh at the apprentice's antics and enjoy the presentation, this fantasized idea of the role of "apprentice" may affect our idea of discipleship more than we realize. In our faith journey, we often think of ourselves as out there on our own doing our best to deal with situations out of our control. But this is not the kind of "discipleship" or "apprenticeship" relationship that Jesus expected from his disciples in his lifetime, nor is it the one He expects from us in ours.

In Jesus' time, a disciple or apprentice to the faith was much like an apprentice in any other kind of learned skilled labor. You didn't learn and then quickly strike out on your own. But a discipleship relationship was a years long endeavor, which involved literally following the rabbi every move, listening to him talk, watching him interact with others, listening and asking questions as he taught, sleeping, eating, and learning every hour of every day by his side. If you were a carpenter's apprentice, you ate, slept, and worked side by side with the master carpenter. If you were a builder's apprentice, you ate, slept, and worked side by side with the master builder. If you were an apprentice of the faith, you ate, slept, and learned/interacted side by side with the master rabbi.

Jesus, able to make his own interpretations of scripture and call his own group of disciples, was a master rabbi in his day. And he would have expected his apprentices (disciples, that is "learners") to follow in his footsteps wherever he went, to travel with him, sleep and eat beside him, learn from his interactions with people and from his teachings, and learn to imitate him so passionately that they would think and behave like him instinctively.

In a sense, apprenticeship is like learning a foreign language. At first, you need to think about each word or phrase, the grammar and the appropriateness of your response. But soon, your responses come naturally, your words flow easily from your mind, and fluency begins to emerge. For some of you, the same might be true with learning an

instrument. In learning an instrument, it's not enough to learn notes from a page. You must sit with a teacher and learn how to play. Listen, imitate, practice, learn. Year after year, you sit beside the teacher until you begin to sense the music on your own.

This is apprenticeship. Faith in praxis at the feet of a master.

Because of the practice part of learning in an apprenticeship style, it's not enough to sit with books. Discipleship is a "practiced" behavioral and relationship learning experience. It begins by building a relationship with the master, watching, listening, imitating, learning. It continues until the apprentice becomes a master. Even then, many masters still sit at the feet of their own beloved teacher.

Discipleship is a relational learning experience involving both head and heart, in which the apprentice passionately seeks to become so like the master that he or she will think and behave as the master does instinctively and intuitively.

Because this style of learning demands practice, much of an apprentice's learning experiences come not from listening to words, but in experiencing "teachable moments" –times when the apprentice watches the teacher interact with others, when they interact along with the master to a degree, and learn from the master's responses.

Jesus is master of the teachable moment.

And our scripture today demonstrates one of the greatest of these. Only in understanding the role of the apprentice can one truly understand this scripture. Those who merely seek to read the words will easily become confused. But place yourself into the story, into the role of apprentice, into Jesus' teachable moment, and you will find yourself stunned and your worldview changed, just as theirs was changed.

For change, real change, the kind of heart shift that changes your whole world view, doesn't happen by reading a manual. It only happens when you experience first-hand, a life-altering experience. This is a true apprenticeship event. This is true discipleship learning.

Let's read through the scripture again carefully, paying close attention to what's going on. Place yourself as a disciple into the story. Watch the people around you. Watch Jesus interact. Listen to the interactions. And then pay attention to what happens next.

Jesus is talking to a crowd of people. He's trying to teach them the importance of a loving heart and that a loving heart creates loving behavior toward others. He is telling them that the Jewish purity laws, laws that require you to wash your hands before a meal, only to eat certain foods, to be careful about what goes into your mouth at certain times, are man-made laws and not God's concern. Eating a certain kind of food is not going to contaminate you in the eyes of God.

Obviously, Jesus is making some pretty strong enemies of the Pharisees, the monitors of the purity laws, as he's saying this. But he goes on.

Then he tells them, what truly contaminates a person in God's sight, the true "contaminants" of the heart are evil thoughts, thoughts of murder, adultery, theft, slander, and insults! When those kinds of feelings in the heart are acted out in word and deed, this is what harms us in God's sight.

Now I want you to look at that list again. Look at the last two. Slander. And insults. When we harbor hate in our hearts, bias, judgments against others, and when those come out of us in the form of the way we speak to others, the way we treat others, the way we exclude others –this harms us in God's sight.

Now I also want you to notice how confused Jesus' disciples are by what he's saying. Remember that they, as well as he, are good Jewish men. They follow all of the laws and customs. They are extremely confused. They notice how angry the Pharisees are getting, because Jesus is telling people that upholding their Jewish customs are not necessary for God's affection and favor. They are worried at where Jesus is going with all of this. When they question Jesus, he replied, "Leave the Pharisees alone. They are blind people who are guides to blind people. If a blind person leads another blind person, they will both fall into a ditch."

That's some strong language directed toward Jesus' peers. Peter asks him to explain further. This has shocked him and the others.

For us today it would be the same as saying, all of your customs, your church traditions, your liturgies, your rules, your ways of doing things, your great church attendance –they don't matter at all to God. What matters is the hate, bias, judgments that you harbor in your hearts toward others, especially when they manifest in your behaviors toward others. Or your exclusion of others.

Jesus repeats again what he's trying to say to Peter and the others: Eating without washing hands doesn't contaminate in God's sight. But what comes from the heart can. Your evil thoughts, false testimonies, insults. From there, Jesus went to the regions of Tyre and Sidon.

Now this is the most important statement in the story.

Jesus hasn't ended the lesson. Jesus is now entering a teachable moment. He is continuing his lesson, which his disciples are having a hard time understanding and swallowing without an example. So, he leads them out of Jewish territory and into pagan territory, into the gentile regions of Tyre and Sidon, location of the prior northern kingdom, corrupted by Ahab, and his Syro-Phoenician wife, Jezebel. This is a region no self-respecting Jew would travel though intentionally. This is a region Jewish people avoided. The Syro-Phoenicians, also known as the former Canaanites, are heretics, a people whom Jesus' disciples would avoid, deride, insult, exclude, demean, and look down upon.

They probably wondered where Jesus was taking them and why on earth he would lead them into unsafe territory, among "those" people. But Jesus does, and an important interaction ensues.

A Syro-Phoenician woman comes up to Jesus and shouts: "Show me mercy, Son of David. My daughter is suffering terribly from demon possession."

Jesus is with his disciples, no doubt watching for their response. He doesn't respond at first. He waits for his disciples' reaction. Here is how they react:

"Send her away; she keeps shouting at us!"

They react, the way Jesus expects them to react. With derision, contempt, haughtiness, arrogance toward the Syro Phoenician woman. This is the way, as Jewish men, they were taught to behave.

So, playing along, Jesus responds as he feels his disciples would, saying, "I've been sent only to the lost sheep, the people of Israel." (Now, remember, they are in the former northern kingdom, where "the lost sheep of Israel" reside.)

The woman comes and kneels before Jesus and says, "Lord, help me."

Jesus replies again as his disciples might, saying: "It is not good to take the children's bread and toss it to dogs."

Now remember, Jesus has just taught his disciples and others that insults from the heart are what are not good in God's sight. But the disciples still don't get it. I imagine they are feeling quite justified at this moment as the conversation goes on.

The woman replies, "Yes, Lord, but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall off their masters' table."

Now imagine the disciples' reaction, as Jesus replies:

"Woman, you have great faith. It will be just as you wish." And right then her daughter was healed.

The disciples must have been like, "Wait, what just happened!" "What did he say?" "Great faith?" That woman?

Jesus is master of the teachable moment, because he is master of what you might call "shock value!" If you are not shocked and confused by Jesus' reactions, then you haven't yet experienced the true impact of this story.

Jesus allowed his disciples to enter into the story with their usual biases, judgements, and reactions, and then he quickly twisted their minds to show them what it truly means to act with a loving heart that God would honor and bless.

It made no difference to Jesus whether they washed their hands before they ate or not. It would make a difference to Jesus how they would treat a woman, different from them, with different beliefs than them, who needed help, and turned to them for assistance.

Insults, judgments, exclusionary thoughts. These contaminate one in the sight of God. But a loving heart is pleasing in God's sight.

Being the Rabbi's apprentice is not about going about our own business, making our own decisions, retaining our own judgments, refusing to let go of our beliefs, our traditions, our rituals, and our learned behaviors.

It's about getting our heads out of joint and our systems shocked into a new kind of truth, one that accepts people no matter who they are, and loves people as children of God, even if they don't seem to fit into our own expectations of what a good person should be.

Discipleship is not about expressing our own opinions. But it's about following Jesus so closely, paying attention to his interactions so carefully, imitating him so well for years on end, that we begin to respond as he would.

Now in the name of Jesus, go and do the same.
ChristianGlobe Networks, Inc., , by Lori Wagner

II

Someone once said that a pun is the lowest form of humor, but sometimes I can't resist. There once was a young man--a Puritan, somewhere around Boston in the 18th century--who had a great deal of difficulty remembering the various rules of conduct in his community. He tried hard, but was constantly being ridiculed because of some breach of etiquette. In desperation, he asked an older man, also a Puritan, to teach him proper manners. The task was formidable, and the older man's patience grew thin, as he had to repeatedly chastise the younger man for his awkward ways.

Finally, on the way into church one Sunday, the younger man started into the building ahead of the older man. He was firmly collared by his elder, who then allowed a lady to go in ahead of both of them. The young man expressed his regret about walking in front of the older gent and the lady.

The older gent still lost his temper. He screamed, "Canst thou remember nothing? How much easier can it become?"

Pointing out the woman who had just entered, he said, "It is I before Thee, except after She!" (1)

Pretty bad, I admit.

She was a single mom with a special needs child, and she desperately needed Jesus' help. Okay, so the scriptures don't actually say that she was single. Our lesson simply doesn't mention her husband, but I've seen enough single moms courageously facing difficult obstacles that I can imagine she may have been one of them.

Perhaps her husband had been killed in an accident or simply died young as many people did back then. Maybe when he saw the extent of his daughter's disability, he decided he didn't want that kind of responsibility, and simply walked out. That happened back then as it does today. We don't know all the background to the story, but we know this was a woman who needed help.

The story takes place in the region of Tyre and Sidon which was Canaanite territory. A woman from that territory came to Jesus, crying out, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is demon-possessed and suffering terribly."

Now we don't know how this so-called demon-possession manifested itself. Her daughter may well have been suffering from epileptic seizures. Those of you with a child who has experienced a seizure either from epilepsy or perhaps from having an especially high fever know how scary it can be. Imagine such a problem experienced by a parent in that pre-scientific time. You can imagine how they might label their child as demon-possessed.

Jesus' reaction to this desperate woman's request is quite disturbing. The truth is, he didn't respond at all. That seems so out of character, doesn't it? The Master always responded to human need of any kind.

His disciples certainly didn't want to have anything to do with the woman. They came to him and urged him, "Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us."

Then, as if things couldn't get any worse, Jesus turned to the woman and said something that has disturbed scholars as well as ordinary Christians for more than 2,000 years. He said, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel."

What did he mean by that? Was he just testing her? Maybe so, but didn't Jesus know his mission was to the whole world? Following the Old Testament revelations the Messiah was to come to save Israel and Israel's job was to save humanity.

That was not what the woman was hoping for. But she would not be denied. She came and knelt before him. "Lord, help me!" she said.

Here we go again. Jesus replies in words that puzzle us even today. "It is not right," he said, "to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs."

Can you believe that? Jesus was actually comparing this woman to a dog? Oh, we know . . . scholars tell us that he used a gentle term for dog that denotes a household pet, and we all love our pets. But still . . . Jesus referring to a woman even as a household pet is really disturbing. "It is not right," he said, "to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs." It was also one of those common expressions at the time, "Yes it is, Lord," she answered somewhat defiantly. "Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table."

I cannot tell you how much I admire this woman. She lived in a time when women didn't get the respect [they] do today, although some of you would argue women still don't get the respect they deserve. If any male wonders about this today just ask any woman, if she gets the respect she deserves in and out of the Army.

But this woman was a fighter. She was going to gain both Jesus' respect for herself as well as healing for her daughter by answering him as if she were the equal of any man in the territory. Don't you admire her? She was bright; she was articulate, and she stood up for her beliefs.

I say, I admire her, but it is evident that Jesus admired her too. When she had so superbly replied to what could be taken as an insult, Jesus said to her, "Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted." And her daughter was healed at that moment.

There are only two people that Jesus says have great faith, this woman and the Centurion who had the ill servant. Both were Gentiles.

What a great story. This woman earned Jesus' respect and, even more important, she had her daughter healed.

What are some lessons we can learn from this courageous woman?

Here's the first lesson: There are times when Christ wants us to stand up for ourselves. Last week we talked about the importance of courage in Christian living. We said that Jesus doesn't want us to be wimps. And he doesn't.

Consider this woman's situation. Jewish men, historically, did not speak to women in public, even their own wives. Especially rabbis. In Jewish culture, women were valued only for their childbearing and mothering skills. Men had the authority to divorce them at will, for any reason, or for no reason at all. A woman had no such right.

At the time of Christ, women were not allowed equal access to the Temple.

Furthermore, a woman wasn't allowed to even read from the Scriptures and was not counted as a member of the congregation. Even one of their most respected rabbis a century after Jesus was crucified was quoted as saying, "One must utter three doxologies every day: Praise God that he did not create me a gentile. Praise God he did not create me a woman! Praise God that he did not create me an slave." This is why St Paul in Galatians states "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus"

Every strike was against this woman. Wrong gender, wrong religion, wrong nationality--but still she spoke up and she spoke out. And Jesus loved her for it.

Don't you love it when somebody stands up for their convictions? Far too many of us give in and give up when we are confronted with some injustice.

I read a wonderful story recently about a couple who stood up to an injustice during the housing crisis a few years back when so many homes were being foreclosed on. The story is set in Naples, Florida. In 2011, Warren and Maureen Nyerges paid \$165,000 in cash to buy a home. Imagine their surprise when a few months later, Bank of America, in an obvious mistake, filed a foreclosure claim against them. How could that be? They had paid cash for their house--and yet the bank had filed foreclosure papers on it.

Warren and Maureen took the bank to court. Fortunately, they won. The judge not only dismissed the foreclosure claim, but he also ordered the bank to pay their court costs (about \$2,500).

The bank refused to pay the court costs. And so Warren and Maureen took matters in their own hands. They showed up at a Naples branch of the Bank of America with a court-approved "foreclosure of assets" notice of their own as well as a moving-company crew. The workers began to seize furniture from the lobby of the branch bank in the same way that a large bank might serve a foreclosure on an unsuspecting family. Can you imagine the scene? Workers started carrying out chairs and desks and computers. Less than an hour later, the bank paid up. (2)

Wow! What a delightful story. We love it when the little guy turns the table on a big institution. We love it when, even in the tiniest way, justice prevails.

I had a chuckle over the story of a guy who rushed down to the local supermarket on a Saturday afternoon to pick up a few snack items. The big game was going to be on, so he was having a few friends over to watch it.

The store was loaded with shoppers and as he headed for the six item express lane--the only one that didn't have a long line--a woman, completely ignoring the overhead

sign, slipped into the check-out line just in front of him pushing a cart piled high with groceries.

The man was quietly fuming at what he knew would be a lengthy delay. Much to his delight, however, the elderly cashier at the express lane motioned for the woman to come forward. The cashier looked into the overflowing cart and asked ever so sweetly, "So Dearie, which six items would you like to buy?" (3)

I don't know if that really happened or not, but, boy, don't you wish it would sometimes? Of course, it would be even better if it happened over something that was really significant.

Some of you will remember a classic movie from the 1950s titled *Twelve Angry Men*. It starred Henry Fonda and was based on the stage play of the same name.

In it Fonda plays a character on a jury. For the other 11 people on the jury, the case was simple, open and shut. The defendant was guilty and they all voted that way right away. Only Fonda's character wanted to weigh the evidence and sift through to find a just verdict.

Throughout the lengthy deliberations, Fonda held fast to his insistence that the jury owed the young man, who was facing the death penalty, all due consideration. Piece by piece, each bit of evidence was weighed, at first reluctantly by all the other jurors. Then, as new information came to light, one by one, the others were convinced by Fonda that reasonable doubt existed in the case. They too decided to vote not guilty.

Finally, as the last part of the prosecution's case was stripped bare, the last of the jurors concluded that they could not convict beyond the shadow of a doubt, and all voted "Not Guilty." Justice was done because one man refused to go along with the majority. (4)

It takes a strong person to stand up to his or her peers and do the right thing. It is so much easier to do the expedient thing than to do the right thing. That's true in basic when bullying is taking place. That's true at work when ethical corners are being cut. That's true in the community when injustice of any kind is occurring.

I say it takes a strong person to stand up to one's peers. I wish I could say simply, it takes a Christian to stand up to one's peers, but often Christians are content to be "nice" and "sweet" rather than people who stand up to evil.

It's hard to believe that we call ourselves followers of One who went to the cross because of the evil and injustice of the world, when we in turn are so timid about confronting evil. Are we Catholics Christians? We have to stand up for our Church and for Jesus when people say Catholics are no Christians.

One thing nobody ever said about Jesus was that he was a really nice, sweet person. Jesus was a trouble maker. He said that he had not come to bring peace, but a sword. There was no neutral ground in his view of the world. You were either on the side of the kingdom or you were a child of Satan. You belonged either to the light or you belonged to the darkness. As it is written in the Didache, one of the earliest Christian writings. You were either hot or cold, but if you were lukewarm, he would spit you out of his mouth (Revelations 3:16)

I'm deliberately speaking in strong terms today because it is increasingly evident that too many Christians today are confusing humility with timidity. That's a sad mistake. Jesus was humble, but he was not timid. You don't drive money-changers out of the Temple if you are timid.

But you say, “What about the beatitude that says, “Blessed are the meek . . . ?” Scholars tell us that “meekness” in the context that Jesus uses it is closer to the word “obedient.” A tame horse is obedient, but it is not timid. A humble Christian is obedient to the commands of God, but is not timid in the face of injustice. Jesus needs people who will speak out against evil and injustice. Jesus needs people who will boldly witness to their faith.

Jesus needs people who are conciliatory, who are willing to meet others half way, but he doesn’t need people who are content to be doormats, who let others walk over them or others. I fear that the Christian community no longer has any real impact on our world simply because we no longer stand for anything of consequence. We are afraid of rocking the boat. We are afraid of offending our neighbor. We are afraid others will criticize us.

What do we think Jesus meant when he said that his followers must deny themselves and take up a cross and follow him? Do we think that he meant to rush out to the jewelry store and buy a little trinket to wear around our neck and be sure not to miss Sunday school three weeks in a row? He meant so much more than that.

A woman came to Jesus to beg for his help. Her daughter was in desperate shape. At first, he seemed to ignore her request, but the woman would not be put off. She stood her ground. She even engaged in a theological debate with the popular young rabbi. Jesus was so impressed that he praised her in a way that he only praised one other person in the New Testament. Jesus said to her, “Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted.” And her daughter was immediately healed.

She was a woman of great faith which made her a woman of great courage. Can that be said of you? Are you a woman or a man of great faith and, therefore, of great courage? Or are you satisfied to simply be another nice, sweet person who never ripples the waters, never stands up to your peers? Let us pray for the courage of our beliefs. Let us pray to be authentic followers of Jesus. For it’s in Christ’s name we make our prayer.

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1. Paul K. Jewett, *Man as Male and Female*, (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1975. Cited in Keith Giles, *The Power of Weakness* (Kindle Edition).
 2. *Uncle John’s 24-Karat Gold Bathroom Reader* (Bathroom Readers’ Press, 2008).
 3. Adapted from Rev. Dr. Luke Bouman, <http://www.predigten.uni-goettingen.de/archiv-7/050619-8-e.html>.
 4. *Pastor Tim’s Cybersalt Digest*, <http://www.cybersalt.org/cleanlaugh>.

III Fr Desiano

How long are we willing to wait for a breakthrough? Often we have no choice; it just takes a long time. If people are able to develop a virus for Covid-19 sweeping the world, that would surely be a breakthrough. Maybe it’s around the corner in record time; maybe it will take much longer. When will we have a breakthrough in racial relationships? It’s not only our own country, of course; it’s all the ways people set themselves up as better than others. And, of course, in a nation founded on the idea that all people are “created equal,” when will that equality actually happen?

The readings in today's Scriptures show us just how slowly breakthroughs happen. For one of the biggest breakthroughs in religious experience was the realization that the Resurrection of Jesus had given everyone equal access to God through faith. This idea shook the first believers in Jesus because they assumed that their Jewish heritage certainly gave them an advantage; in fact, many thought being Jewish was a precondition of being a follower of Jesus.

Although this was a new idea that Christianity introduced, we can see in the first reading that this ideal was part of Jewish hopes. Isaiah has a vision in which all people will feel part of God's covenant, even foreigners. "I will bring them to my holy mountain," says God, because God's house will be one of prayer "for all peoples." When Isaiah spoke these words, the Jewish Temple had been completely destroyed by the Babylonians; this trauma led Isaiah to dream of something new.

But we can see in the Gospel passage that this was not an easy idea for people to swallow. When this poor woman, identified as a Canaanite, comes up to Jesus, it's everything she can muster to get passed his disciples, and everything she can muster to get the attention of Jesus. In effect Jesus is saying that his ministry is to the Jewish people, not to others. Almost as if she is representing the primal hopes of all people for healing, she pushes back on Jesus. "Even dogs get scraps; you have plenty; a scrap is enough for me."

Where is the breakthrough in this Gospel? It's in the next to the last line: "O woman, great is your faith." What makes us brothers and sisters, what allows us to know that we have a relationship with God, is the faith that emerges from our hearts. Faith, the ultimate trust that all of us can and must have in God, makes us part of God's covenant of salvation. When we acknowledge the faith in our hearts, the major breakthrough has happened.

When Paul talks about the disobedience of all, he is referring to the basic need we all have to renounce our presuppositions and pride, so that we can experience the mercy of God. God wants everyone to accept the mercy that God offers precisely because all of us need it and because this mercy makes us brothers and sisters, children of the Father. Receiving God's mercy allows us not only to see how equal we are before God; more than anything, it shows us what God is like and, therefore, what we should be like.

When we think about the breakthroughs in our own lives we begin to realize that, although they seemed like all-of-a-sudden, the beginnings of these breakthrough go way back in our lives. We finally realized something had to change. Obviously we have been working on social breakthroughs in our nation since the beginning. For many of these we've needed revolution, massive protests, and even a civil war.

But the more we can experience and accept breakthroughs in our own lives the most possible it becomes for God's ultimate vision of a renewed humanity to come about.