

PUPPY LOVE

Matthew 15:21-28

²¹*Leaving that place, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon.*
²²*A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is demon-possessed and suffering terribly."*

²³*Jesus did not answer a word. So his disciples came to him and urged him, "Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us."*

²⁴*He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel."*

²⁵*The woman came and knelt before him. "Lord, help me!" she said.*

²⁶*He replied, "It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs."*

²⁷*"Yes it is, Lord," she said. "Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table."*

²⁸*Then Jesus said to her, "Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted." And her daughter was healed from that very hour. [TNIV]*

PUPPIES

Today I'm going to talk about puppy love.

I'm sure some of you at least were told by a well-meaning mum or dad that the first love you ever had was just "puppy love".

But that's not the sort of puppy love I'm talking about. I'm talking about love of puppies.

A couple of Girls Brigade nights ago, one of the older girls brought a puppy along. Talk about a distraction! All of a sudden there were twenty or so girls talking baby talk to this puppy. And they all wanted to know everything about this puppy.

It was only just another dog. But those girls had instantly fallen in love with it.

A MONGREL

In our Bible text we hear about another puppy, and another type of puppy love.

The puppy this time is actually a person. A mother, in fact; and she is worried sick about her sick daughter. She keeps yapping at Jesus to help her.

Now, I don't know about you, but I find yapping dogs a real nuisance.

To make matters worse, as far as Canaanite relations with Israelites/Jews went, she would be regarded as a mongrel. Or like a dog from a pack of the wild dogs that had attacked the Flock of Israel at various times down through the centuries.

So no wonder the disciples tried to chase her away: who'd want a yapping mongrel stray around you all the time?

DOMESTICATED

But Jesus does not reject her. It seems as though he does. For first he does not answer her – he just ignores her. Then he tells her his business is only with the Israelites, the Jews. Then he effectively tells her she is not even worth considering a human being: she is more like a dog!

But each response of Jesus is more like offering a puppy a bowl of milk and a leash.

Jesus seems to ignore her. But he does not come straight out and tell her to go away. Now, if you've experienced anything about puppies, unless you actually growl at them directly, they assume they have a right to hang about for a bit longer.

This puppy, this Canaanite woman, was not growled at by Jesus. So she still felt confident she could hang about for something, for at least a little while longer.

Next he tells her he should have nothing to do with her. But she responds with a plea that God can never ignore: "Lord, have mercy!"

This is the cry of the beggar on the street. It's the plea of someone who knows he or she depends entirely on God's mercy and grace. And that hits God at his softest spot.

It's like being a puppy looking up to someone with those big round brown eyes, with the heard sort of turned to one side. It takes a fairly mean and uncaring person not to be moved by such a look.

By making this plea, this woman shows that, if not in pedigree then at least in spirit, she is one of the lost sheep of Israel.

I love this scene. She shows us how to catch God at his own word; to grab hold of him by his heart and his promises.

Finally Jesus tells her that she is nothing better than a dog.

Now the word Jesus uses is "puppy". But far from chasing the woman away by making her feel like nothing, Jesus has actually given the woman a leash by which she is attached to Jesus. "Even the puppies eat the crumbs from the table," she says. Which is much the same as saying that even puppies are loved, though not the same as the children are loved.

In other words, "Don't you have some puppy love for me?" she asks Jesus.

No wonder Jesus' heart melted. I am sure it was his intention all along to help her. But what a wonderful example she gives us of how to hold onto God's love, even if it seems only a tiny scrap of love is in our lives.

Jesus' heart melts, and he heals her daughter.



PUPPIES AND CHILDREN, AT THE SAME TIME!

Now, the truth is we all are no better than this Canaanite woman when it comes to our standing before God. We cannot claim to be God's children. Only Jesus can!

We too must yap at God, not about our wants, but about what he has promised us.

We too must simply throw ourselves at Jesus' feet, like beggars pleading for mercy, for we have no rights before God.

And we too must look for a little scrap of love, some puppy love, from Jesus.

But what is amazing is that, though we may come to God through Jesus very much aware of our worthlessness and sin, we leave as far more than yapping puppies. We leave as God's own dear children, as members of God's Kingdom, and not as servants, but as heirs of the kingdom -his royal family.

Until we get to heaven we will always be yapping puppies and royal family at the same time -we are sinners and saints. We are always on that journey from strangers to God needing help, to family members who will sit at God's table in heaven. We are always unworthy, but we are also children of the Father on account of Christ. We live in that tension between what we are -sinners- and what we will be -perfectly innocent saints in heaven.

And so we come before God humbly, like puppies. But we do so knowing confidently that God will raise us to be his children.

This is what we have done today in our worship service. We came as puppies looking for a scrap of God's love. That's why we confessed our sin at the beginning of the service. But we did this knowing that God would send us out from here as his dearly loved children. And so we are!

It's why we baptize two little girls today. In a way, their parents are just like this Canaanite woman. For they too have come to Jesus and pleaded today: "*Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is demon-possessed and suffering terribly.*" Now there's something for the Baptism parents and sponsors to ponder!

And in the miracle of Baptism, Christ gives far more than just crumbs for puppies. In him we are given grace to be heirs of heaven who sit at the Lord's Table.

Hold onto God's promises, everyone, no matter what is happening in your life this week. These are the very rich scraps of God's love that we puppies can chew on over the week. But also know that these scraps transform us into God's children through faith in Jesus. So whether you think of yourself as God's puppy, or God's child, know that you are dearly loved.

Amen.