

THANKFUL FOR THE CRUMBS

By Rev. Lawrence Baldrige

November 20, 2011

Matthew 15:21-28

²¹ Then Jesus went thence, and departed into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon. ²² And, behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil. ²³ But he answered her not a word. And his disciples came and besought him, saying, Send her away; for she crieth after us. ²⁴ But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel. ²⁵ Then came she and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me. ²⁶ But he answered and said, It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs.

²⁷ And she said, Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master's table.

²⁸ Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour.

Here is a story that we don't often see as a Thanksgiving story, but if we look carefully, we will see that it truly is a Thanksgiving story. As I was reading this story those last words, 'crumbs which fall from the Master's table,' seemed to me to be words of humble thankfulness. This dear woman would be thankful for any blessing of mercy that Jesus might give her.

Let me set the background for you--Jesus had been speaking to the Pharisees and Sadducees, and showing them their hypocrisy in their judgment of Him. He knew quite well that they were even then plotting to kill Him, that the end of His earthly ministry was near. Then Jesus suddenly and deliberately withdrew for some rest for Him and His disciples, as He occasionally did, and this time they went to the land of the Phoenicians, near the Mediterranean Sea, near the cities of Tyre and Sidon, Gentile lands, which are now a part of modern day Lebanon. This is the only time recorded in His ministry that He entered a Gentile country.

A woman was there, a very bothersome woman, who had heard of the power of Jesus in healing the sick and in casting out demons, so she came to Jesus to get healing for her daughter, and she wasn't going to be denied. Matthew calls her 'a woman of Canaan,' signifying that she was of a non Jewish race, and Mark calls her a Syrophenician woman, probably of Greek origin. She was absolutely insistent on getting Jesus' attention so she came crying out to Jesus, and begging Jesus to have mercy upon her and to heal her daughter who was vexed with a devil. She called Jesus the Son of David indicating that she knew something of the promise that Jesus was the Lord and King, the promised Messiah of Israel. Moreover, the disciples, in dealing with her, had become so exhausted and so exasperated that they begged Jesus to send her away.

And even though Jesus explained to her that His message, and also His ministry, was to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, still she, being the loving mother that she was, begged and pleaded for healing for her daughter. Then she came up closer to Jesus, as Matthews says, to worship

Him, and Jesus said to her, using a term that the Jews of that day called the Gentiles, “It is not meet to take the children’s bread and to cast it (kunaria-pet dogs) to dogs.” She answered, “Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master’s table.” Someone stated that, being master of the quick retort, Jesus must have admired her quick retort to him. Anyway her retort was a statement of faith, and for this statement, Jesus praised her for such faith and healed her daughter.

But, this woman was also a thankful woman, for she was wanting mercy from our Lord, and she would be thankful for any ‘crumb’ of mercy that would hopefully fall from the Master’s Table to help her poor desperate, helpless and demon-possessed daughter. What she is really saying to our Lord is, “Lord, I’ll be thankful for any crumb you can toss my way.”

As you enter this week of Thanksgiving, 2011, are you thankful to the Lord for everything you have? Do you do as the Apostle Paul said you should do when he wrote, “In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.” Are you thankful for the water you drink, for the air you breathe, for the food that you eat? Are you thankful that you have clothing to wear and shelter over your head and a good bed in which to sleep? Are you thankful for your family, for your friends, for your good health? To all these questions you could probably answer yes – maybe even with a resounding yes. But do you have the faith of this Syrophenician woman who was thankful for crumbs?

I want to suggest to you some of the crumbs today for which you can and ought to be thankful, crumbs for which you surely need to be thankful, crumbs from the Master's Table.

The first crumbs I want to suggest to you are **THE CRUMBS OF GOD'S GLORY AND REVELATION OF HIMSELF IN THE BEAUTY OF NATURE.** As you know, everything in the physical universe, that is, in nature, will pass away. The *Bible* is crystal clear that our days are numbered, that we were born to live our life and die, and that the days and years of our planet in this solar system, and of our universe, and all the starry hosts of heaven are numbered, and will pass away ‘with a fervent heat.’ Our times are in the hands of our Maker, and all the created order will one day cease to be. With that in mind, why should one speak even of the beauty and glory of God revealed in nature? Because we were created to love and appreciate beauty, and even though this beauty is but crumbs, God reveals Himself and His glory in the beauty of nature. We are to be thankful for the crumbs of beauty that fall from the Master's Table.

The poet wrote--
For the beauty of the earth
For the glory of the skies
For the love which from our birth
Over and around us lies
Christ our God to thee we raise
This our hymn of grateful praise.

You see, we can and we should praise God for the Revelation of Himself in nature. Paul was aware of God in nature when he wrote, “In Him we live, and move, and have our being.” Billy Graham said that when He got saved the very trees took on a radiance and a beauty he had never

seen before. That was my experience too. When I got saved, I remember looking at the full moon that April night hanging so beautiful and so low that it almost touched the mountain separating Hollybush and Pippa Passes, and for the first time in my life I saw and beheld and recognized the beauty and the glory of God in nature. I was born anew and the world shined brighter with the glory and the majesty and the grandeur of God. Again the next day and the following days, I could say with the poet, “The world is charged with the grandeur of God...”

Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844–89). Poems. 1918.

God's Grandeur

*THE WORLD is charged with the grandeur of God.
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;
It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil
Crushed. Why do men then now not reckon his rod?
Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;
And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;
And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell: the soil
Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.*

*And for all this, nature is never spent;
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;
And though the last lights off the black West went
Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs—
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.*

The *Bible* says old things are passed away, behold all things are become new. To the new Christian, oftentimes even nature may seem new, the skies may seem new, and the hills and the trees seem new, with the glow and the glory of spiritual beauty. The psalmist knew that experience when he wrote the words, “The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament sheweth His handiwork.”

Remember also the 8th Psalm:

Psalm 8 – To the chief Musician upon Gittith, A Psalm of David.

¹ O Lord our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth! who hast set thy glory above the heavens.

² Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hast thou ordained strength because of thine enemies, that thou mightest still the enemy and the avenger.

³ When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained;

⁴ What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?

⁵ For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour.

⁶Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet:

⁷All sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field;

⁸The fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas.

⁹O Lord our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!

You see, nature reflects the God of Glory, shows glimpses of Him scattered throughout the universe, and shows Him more perfectly in human beings who were created in His very Image. But, when we look at the natural order, we still, as Paul said, ‘See through a glass darkly.’ Do you see what I am saying? God can be seen in the beauty of nature, but can be seen best with spiritual eyes.

Paul wrote in Romans: Romans 1:18-19

¹⁸For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; ¹⁹Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them.

In essence there is enough of the beautiful in nature to condemn us, to prove, in effect, that there is a living God, but not enough in nature to save us. We see the beauty of God in nature, but that is such a minute and small and infinitesimal part of the reality of the Eternal and Everlasting God. In nature we only get the Crumbs of Who God really is. But like the Syrophenician woman, we ought to be thankful for the crumbs. Are you thankful for the crumbs?

When you sing that magnificent song *How Great Thou Art*, you ought to sing it with such adoration and devotion that your heart throbs with the joy of Heaven, because you know and have met the very Author of the Universe, the very Lord of Life. Isn't it wonderful that God can be seen in and through nature? Are you thankful for the crumbs of His beauty in the natural order? If you are, one day you will know even as you are known. Like the Syrophenician woman, I am thankful for the crumbs of God's beauty in nature and long for the day when I can gaze upon His beauty in Eternity. I know that as beautiful as the most beautiful scenes of nature may be, and as magnificent as the purple mountain majesty and the seas and the fruited plains may be, these are only crumbs of the Presence of the Living God – but I am thankful for the crumbs He gives us in nature. Like The Syrophenician woman, I am thankful for the crumbs, the precious crumbs, that fall from The Master's Table.

Let me suggest other crumbs for which we should be thankful, the precious CRUMBS OF TRUTH that we find in Scripture. There really are two books that must be studied by us, the book of nature and the Book of Revelation, the *Bible*. But Paul's statement is so very true and profound, “Now we know in part...” I really love the *Bible*, for it is the Word of God, the record of God's actions in history, the Testament of the truth of God's dealings with humanity. But I only know in part. Sometimes I can read a passage of Scripture over and over again and get little meaning out of it; but then read it again and the Truth of the Word enfleshes itself and fills my soul with joy and peace and power and faith, and love. Yet, I only know in part, and will not wholly know as I am known until I see the Holy God. Scripture gives this testimony of itself:

Hebrews 4:12

¹² For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

The crumbs of truth that I find in the *Bible* thrill my mind, cleanse my heart, and fill my soul. Are you thankful for these crumbs of truth you find in Scripture? I am.

Moreover, as a preacher, I live by the promise –

Isaiah 55:11

¹¹ So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.

I trust you will not think I am demeaning the *Bible* and the Scripture, which I so dearly love and devour and dwell in each and every day, when I say that these are, though very precious crumbs, but crumbs that fall from my Master's table. In His Word, God shows us that the *Bible* is our strengthener, comforter, and guide whereby we may live our lives in accordance with His will. The *Bible* tells us about ourselves, about the human race, about sin, about the Savior, about the Holy Spirit, and about God, our loving heavenly Father. It is milk to the young Christian and meat to the mature Christian. "I will hide His word in my heart that I might not sin against God."

But, the *Bible* is a book of truth, and God is TRUTH, and compared to God, who is All Truth, even the *Bible* is but crumbs from the Master's table. But I am so glad, so eternally glad and happy and thankful that God knew we could not live by bread alone and so gave us crumbs enough so that we might follow their trail and find the Bread, The Triune God.

Still, however we see only through a glass darkly, for if we were to see all truth with the eyes of our flesh we would be blinded by the sheer magnitude of the Light of God's mighty Truth which is more powerful than a thousand blazing suns. You see, with my natural vision, I cannot gaze into the burning physical sun without permanent damage to my eyes; and even when I see the sun ball through dark sunglasses, I cannot gaze for long until I am blinded by the light. God would show us the true Light of Himself if we could receive it, but if He did we would be consumed by that Consuming Fire. I remember as a boy how we used to darken a piece of glass with fire to see an eclipse of the sun as it was in progress, and no matter how dark the glass, it always hurt the eyes.

God, however, did not leave us without a knowledge of Himself, for He showed Himself to us in the book of nature, and much more clearly in the a Book of Life; and although we treasure that treasury of 66 books, compared to the Living God Himself, we only see the crumbs of truth He gives us from His table. Praise God a thousand times, however, for like the Syrophenician woman, I am so thankful for the Crumbs from the Book of Life that have fallen to me from The Master's table, and because of them my soul is saved and secure.

Let me mention a third way that we receive crumbs from the Master's Table, and that is in THE GOODNESS WE SEE IN THE LIVES OF GOD'S SAINTS. Man is but a reflection of the Goodness of God for man was created in the Image of God, and human goodness, human values, human truth, and all that is good in man, comes directly from the Image of God in man. The conscience in man is not, as Freud taught, just learned from parents, but was implanted in man to show him not only who he is, but Whose he is, that there are things more important than the physical, that he is not a body with a spirit, but a spirit with a body, and that the goodness in Man, is Go's goodness, because man is eternally linked to God – and so linked until either man or God Himself severs that link. The only way a man can do that is to go so far that God turns him over to a reprobate mind, turns His back to Him, and says as He said in the Old Testament about Ephraim, Hosea 4:17: ¹⁷ Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone.

And although one sees all goodness as a reflection of Go's goodness, the true goodness of God in man is seen most profoundly in the saints of the Old and New Testaments, and in the Saints of the Church throughout the ages since Christ; but the interesting thing is that these saints of God did not see that Goodness that was in them as their own goodness, as being owned by or belonging to them, but rather as the Goodness of God, within them.

Like you, I have been deeply influenced by the saints of the *Bible*. The Apostle Paul has been a rock for me, a foundation for my faith. I have loved his life and his faithfulness from the time I first encountered him, and that has not lessened but increased throughout the years. It has been my privilege to teach the New Testament and the Old Testament for a number of years, and I am thankful and amazed at all that Paul did and all that he wrote. But my heroes in the Old Testament are Joseph who was so much like our Lord, and Isaiah, the greatest and most eloquent prophet who ever lived. What a magnificent life the both of them lived. But then there is Abraham and Moses and Elijah and the prophets – especially Jeremiah, who has meant so much to my faith. These Biblical saints, by the goodness of God in them, helped to shape my faith. Then in the New Testament, Stephen, and Phillip, and Barnabas and Luke and Timothy and a host of others nurtured my soul.

Then there were the other great Christians that I have encountered through their writings down the years who have been such a help to me – Augustine, and the other Early church Fathers; Martin Luther, the pugnacious Protestant; John Calvin and his immortal Institutes of Religion; Barth and Brunner and other theologians; and the great C. S. Lewis; and the great preachers, like Spurgeon and James Stewart and Helmut Thielicke and Charles Kingsley and many, many others. With the goodness of God within them, they have fed my soul. And then there were the friends and the preachers and the Christian family members who had so internalized the goodness of God that they were foundation stones for my life. I admire them all.

I celebrate and give thanks for the saints of yesterday. Why? Because they set good examples that we can follow in their faithfulness, patience, endurance. Why? Because they fought the good fight, finished the course, and kept the faith. Why? Because they were human like me, sinners like me, but, with the goodness of God filling their hearts, they prevailed, and though many of them were martyred and shamefully treated by a sinful world, they loved, prayed for, and forgave their tormentors, and thereby overcame the weakness of their humanity and gained the victory and the crown.

Yet, don't think me demeaning of the Saints when I say that they were but crumbs from the Master's Table – important crumbs to be sure, so that, like the Syrophenician woman, I am thankful for those crumbs.

But while I am thankful for the crumbs of God's mercy, I am more thankful this Thanksgiving Season for the full revelation of God's Beauty in Christ Jesus, the full revelation of God's Truth in Christ Jesus, and the full revelation of God's Righteousness in Christ Jesus, who is the Way, and the Truth, and the Life.

Jesus, you see, is the fullness of the Godhead bodily. He is not the crumbs from the Master's Table, He is the Master, for HE IS THE BREAD OF LIFE. And Such was her faith that the Syrophenician woman knew this. The Apostle Paul writes this Truth about Jesus:

Colossians 1:15-17

¹⁵ Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: ¹⁶ For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: ¹⁷ And he is before all things, and by him all things consist.

Jesus stood speaking one day before critics and disciples, and made this assertion: John 8:58 **Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am.** In making that statement He was saying, "I am the One who spoke to Moses. I am the One who told Abraham to leave his country behind and follow me. I am God!" Jesus is the Image of God, the Beauty of God Incarnate; he is the Truth of God that alone can free mankind; he, Jesus, is the Eternal Goodness of God. Everything true, good and beautiful are but crumbs from the Master's Table; but Jesus is the Master! Everything that testifies to the revelation of God is good, but Jesus is God.

Like the Syrophenician woman, we should be thankful for the crumbs. But above all, this Thanksgiving we should be thankful for the **BREAD!** Jesus said in John 6:48-51 ⁴⁸ I am that bread of life. ⁴⁹ Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead. ⁵⁰ This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die. ⁵¹ I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.

Jesus died on the cross for your sin. Will you give your heart to Him and live. With Jesus you truly have something to be thankful about. He is the Bread of Life! Thank God for the crumbs! But above all, thank God for the Bread!

There is a story from the mission field in India about a Christian evangelist aboard a train who walked through the train cars one day, giving out tracts about salvation to the crowded travelers. One angry man took a tract and ripped it to shreds, and with disgust for the evangelist, and for Christianity, opened the window and threw out the thin shreds into the wind, and the shreds, like blowing leaves, fell wherever the wind carried them. One shred fell into the middle

of the railroad tracks beside one of the cross ties, almost impossible to see, lost, it seemed, -lost forever to the sight of man.

Later that day a railroad work crew came along, and one of the workers saw that shred of a tract, picked it up, and read in his language the only three words on it – Bread of Life. He wondered what this meant, these strange words, Bread of Life. He kept that shred, and asked others what it meant. The Holy Spirit gripped his heart with these three words, Bread of Life. Someone finally suggested to him that it sounded like Christian propaganda, and that a mission station far from there could perhaps tell him what these three words meant. He walked for more than a hundred miles to find that mission station and asked the first person he met what these three words meant. That believer sat down with him and shared with him Christ, The Bread of Life; and the lost man, the hungry man, ate of that Bread and found Eternal Life. This poor lost man found salvation in the Bread of Life.

The crumbs that fall from the Master's Table are wonderful indeed, the beauty of God in nature, the truth of God in Scripture, and the goodness of God in His saints – all which form a trail that we can follow and the Living Bread – but the Bread alone gives Eternal Life. Will you eat of that Life-Giving Bread? Jesus is here today. His arms are open wide to save you. Come, make Him the Bread of your life, and be forever thankful. In His Name. Amen.