

1. This past Tuesday night was "C day."

"C day" because it was **Census Day** across Australia. Everyone on Aussie soil was required to fill out a census form. So do we have any Jedi's in the house today?

As you worked through those questions on Tuesday night I wonder if your eyes picked up what the article in Monday's Post said. The article talked about 'C day' where the 'C' stood for all the things we have in common. There are so many basic things that we all have in common.

Yet it's so much easier to pick out what's different about a person than to see what you have in common with them. That's why we're surprised when we make the effort to really get to know someone else – and all of a sudden, your differences fade into the background. They're not important anymore because what you see in a friend are all the great things you have in common!

That's the reward we receive when we make the effort or others make the effort with us. But it doesn't always happen that way. Too often we use our differences to provide enough self-justification to ignore people, fear them, to look past them, live separately from them and avoid inviting them into our home – basically to reject them. Sometimes we catch ourselves doing it – but tragically there are times when we don't even notice we're doing it anymore.

2. Who did Jesus and his disciples see in the Gospel?

A Canaanite woman enters the scene making all kinds of noise. Jesus and his band of followers are confronted with an annoying and persistent woman! And she wasn't just any woman – she was a Canaanite woman! Who did the disciples see when they looked at her? Not what they had in common! Maybe they thought back to the Israelites entering the Promised Land and Deut 20:17 that says,

*"⁷ ...completely destroy them—the Hittites, Amorites, **Canaanites**, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites—as the LORD your God has commanded you. ¹⁸ Otherwise, they will teach you to follow all the detestable things they do in worshipping their gods, and you will sin against the LORD your God."*

Did they see someone who was unclean? Unfit for fellowship with them? A pagan?

This woman continues to cry out in a loud voice, *"Have mercy on me Lord, Son of David!"* She won't stop! Jesus doesn't answer her and so the disciples get up beside Jesus asking, *'send her away, for she keeps crying out after us.'* Did they mean: *Can you get rid of her Lord – we're really uncomfortable having her around making all this racket!?* Have you come across people like that at church – where everything would be a whole lot more comfortable if they just left?

Jesus responds some-what cryptically saying, *"I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel."* (This will make more sense in a moment). By now the woman is on her knees in front of Jesus begging, *'Lord help me!'* She's desperate. She's a mother to a daughter who is cruelly tormented by demonic forces – and she's on her knees crying out for help. Crying out Names like 'Lord' and 'Son of David.' Names reserved for the promised messiah! And so it can seem a little shocking when Jesus responds with the parable of the children and the dogs!

²⁶ Jesus 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."

3. Anyone here have a pet dog?

How happy and glad is your pet dog when food drops off the table and onto the floor? Talk about rejoicing! I’ve had a few dogs and what I’ve experienced is an animal that relishes every single meal or scrap handed to it as if it’s a last meal. I mean they’ll take all kinds of food and perform every trick you require before you hand over a single dog biscuit! Dogs are so thankful for every morsel. But that’s usually where the analogy ends for us isn’t it? Would you like to be called dogs? No – that’s offensive ... but not for the Canaanite woman...

The children in the parable are the lost people of Israel; and the pet dogs in the parable are the other nations – including this woman and her daughter. The dogs Jesus mentions aren’t the offensive kind of wild dogs – they are pet dogs and house pets. What everyone seems to miss here is that these **dogs are still at the dinner table with the children - they’re not chained up outside!**

Yes Jesus’ ministry is focussed on the lost sheep of Israel as he said earlier, but in the meantime, even the Gentiles can still relish every morsel and crumb of the life-changing gospel of forgiveness and healing as the message is preached to the Jews.

Amazingly for this Canaanite woman, to be a pet dog at the table is all that matters in this moment.

One scrap, one crumb of that powerful kingdom bread is all it takes for her worst nightmare to be over and her daughter’s life to be transformed. To be a pet dog under the table - lying in wait, is all that matters in this moment. I can only imagine the intensity of this woman as she awaits Jesus’ response.

Verse 28 reads, “*Then Jesus answered, “Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted.”* And her daughter was healed from that very hour.

4. Why does Jesus say she has GREAT faith?

He never told the disciples they had great faith. Wouldn’t you like to have GREAT faith or at least more than you have? More often than not we feel like Peter sinking in the storm and Jesus’ words, “O you of little faith!”

There’s only one other place in the bible where Jesus commends a person for having GREAT faith. It’s another gentile - the Centurion in Matthew 8. Listen to the posture and attitude of the centurion,

⁸The centurion replied, “Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. But just say the word, and my servant will be healed. ⁹For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, ‘Go,’ and he goes; and that one, ‘Come,’ and he comes. I say to my servant, ‘Do this,’ and he does it.” ¹⁰When Jesus heard this, he was astonished and said to those following him, “I tell you the truth, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith. ¹

The Canaanite woman was honoured to be a pet dog under the table eating crumbs. The Centurion acknowledged that he didn’t deserve to have Jesus come under his roof and submitted himself to

¹ *The Holy Bible: New International Version*. 1996 (electronic ed.) (Mt 8:8–10). Zondervan: Grand Rapids, MI

Jesus’ authority. He didn’t need any fuss – just a word from Jesus. What’s the posture and attitude of these people? They are as beggars before the Lord! That’s what they have in common even though **they’re two very different people.**

What do you have in common with them? Are you content to forego all the fuss and receive a simple word from Jesus? Are you happy to kneel in the dust at his feet – to be a beggar? Or is that beneath you?

It doesn’t matter what country you’re from, what you do with your life, what tax bracket you’re in or whether you’re young or old – we all share one thing in common. Census day or not – this never changes: **We are as beggars before the Lord.**

This isn’t very culturally acceptable and so some people may take that news as if they’ve been called a dog. That’s okay, sometimes Godly truth is confronting to human pride. The cross of Christ is not a right that you or anyone deserves. Its beauty lies in the very fact that you don’t deserve it and yet Christ died for you. This is an on-going struggle for everyone.

5. The truth is that to be a beggar before the Lord is where every true disciple belongs.

And like the Canaanite woman – know that you’re blessed to be a beggar under the Lord’s table! It’s what makes GREAT faith because it is excited to receive everything God has to give. It’s great because it rests solely in the promises of God.

Great faith holds fast to the mysteries of God: That when Jesus died on the cross, the curtain in the Temple was torn in two from top to bottom. That means through Jesus you have special access to God in a whole new way.

Hebrews 10 says, ¹⁹ Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰ by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, ²¹ and since we have a great priest over the house of God, ²² let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. ²³ Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.’

With the cross, with the temple curtain being torn in two, with Jesus dying and rising in your place you can confidently come into the Most Holy place – a place that was reserved for the High Priest of the Temple once per year. You can enter that place through faith in Jesus and pray, “Lord have Mercy! Christ have mercy! Lord have mercy on me!”

You can pray that simple little scriptural prayer knowing that the LORD is faithful and will fill your empty hands with everything you need, but can’t provide for yourself. Whether it’s strength in your marriage, courage to face those difficult times ahead of you, a voice to pray for your family and friends, vision to see beyond outward appearances, words to speak to someone who needs help, the will to serve instead of demanding service wherever you go – whatever it is that you need.

That’s great faith. It is not a matter of being a hero or some kind of super-believer or better than the next person. It is learning that you are in fact a beggar. It is a matter of being aware that you have nothing to bring before God and nothing to say to God, except maybe: “Lord, help me!”

6. Luther's famous last words on this earth were "We are beggars. That is the truth."

Maybe that would be a better option for the census form than people writing 'Jedi!'

We are God's beggars – from the font to the grave, kneeling before a loving and mighty Lord with our empty hands open ready to be filled with the bread of heaven.

- Beggars made rich;
- beggars loved and dressed in fine clothes;
- beggars adopted and brought in from the cold;
- baptised into the royal family;
- Beggars lifted up by the forgiveness and grace of Jesus Christ.
- That's great faith!

As you walk out of here today and see people who are very different to you; remember what you have in common: "We are all beggars, this is the truth." Maybe you could even befriend a fellow beggar and show them where to find the eternal bread that's made your empty hands full today? Amen.