

Dogs Welcome!

[Isaiah 35^{4-7a}; Psalm 146;] James 2^{1-10,14-17}; Mark 7^{24-end}

Has not God chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom that he has promised to those who love him. [James 2⁵]

In the Rectory we know the truth of the exchange between Jesus and the Syrophenocian woman. Dibley and Deacon love when the younger grandchildren are strapped to a high chair - Deacon waits for a hand to drop the food to the side and Dibley stations herself under the table to catch anything that misses the mouth and falls to the floor.

How do you feel about being a dog? I may be the only one here with a collar, but (as far as the text is concerned) we are all dogs: we are outsiders, waiting for crumbs. As we celebrate a baptism of a convert to Christianity today, I suppose that I have three questions:

What sort of Jesus?

- ✦ I know that not everyone shares my understanding of the encounter between Jesus and the woman - some see this as Jesus being rude and offensive. However (as I have said before) I am convinced that this shows Jesus sense of fun, detecting in his sparring partner a lively spirit whom can cope with the banter.
- ✦ It is an inditement in our society that so many - lacking a sense of humour - see the alleged sexism or racism and miss the point that this is the Jesus who, as a evidence of his divinity, heals the girl about whom he and his mother had their exchange.
- ✦ Our Christian faith is built on the belief that Jesus is uniquely the Son of God, who became human and was born of the Virgin Mary, who lived a perfect life, who was executed by the Roman authorities, who rose from the dead and who and lives on. Our faith is in that Jesus!

This woman in the Gospels was someone who recognised the uniqueness of Jesus and knew that he alone could help her - in baptism we have a public declaration that this choice has been made.

What sort of crumbs?

By the grace of God the crumbs do us good!

- ✦ The first is forgiveness - Christianity is unique in assuring those who ask it from Jesus that their sins of the past, the present and the future are forgiven. The death of Jesus on the cross secures that forgiveness for us.
- ✦ The second is the assurance that in this life and when this life comes to an end we live with Jesus. We are a people of hope - in this life and beyond it.
- ✦ A third is this, that God has given his Holy Spirit as our companion - the ongoing presence of Jesus with us.. Life may not be easy of straightforward, but we are never alone and we are never without support.

These are the crumbs that we 'dogs' can hoe to catch as they fall from the table!

What sort of response?

When we become a Christian we choose to embrace all that God offers to us, but we also choose to embrace a way of life that is like Jesus. The Lottery adverts at the moment are very engaging - showing that altruism is alive and well - Who wins if you win? We can trust the Epistle of James to inform us about Jesus' priorities as James was his half-brother and would have lived with him.

- ✦ We try to see people from God's perspective - the things that impress us aren't the same as the things that impress God, therefore we have to work at not being biased towards wanting to help the people that are like us!
- ✦ Faith means that we also act to help others - **Go in peace** isn't a proper response to the hungry or the needy. That said, money is too often the easy way out - what Jesus did and James supports is proper engagement with people's lives.

Training Christians is very much like training dogs - it is about clarity, it is about trust and it about relationship.