

Out On A Limb      Matthew 15:21-28      August 17, 2008

Squirrels live in trees. They spend a good percentage of their lives moving from one limb to another. But we don't live in trees. Most of us are not comfortable when we have to go out on a limb. As a matter of fact, life is not easy when you find yourself out on a limb.

That was the challenge that the Canaanite woman faced in the Gospel reading in Matthew 15 today. Her daughter was sick. Actually she was possessed by a demon. My guess is that she had tried everything she could think of to help her daughter, but nothing helped. She had an option, give up and let the demon control her daughter's life or climb out on a limb and ask Jesus for help. She chose to climb out on a limb.

This encounter took place in part of modern day Lebanon. Jesus and his disciples had moved as far away as possible from Herod Antipas, the son of Herod the Great who had executed John the Baptist. The Canaanites were some of the earliest settlers of this part of the world. They were not only pagans, but also long time enemies of the Jewish people and faith.

Strict social codes of conduct of the Ancient Near East made it difficult for men and women to socialize in public. So she had to go way out on a limb to approach Jesus in public, to ask for his help. But her approach was the right one because she called Jesus "Lord," the name that Jewish people used for God and the title that true believers called Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew.

So the woman approached Jesus in faith. At first Jesus simply ignored her. When she didn't take the hint, the disciples begged Jesus to send her away. They didn't want to be bothered by this pesky pagan woman. Then Jesus said, "**I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.**" Of course Jesus was right. God's plan was to bring salvation to the Jewish people first and then to the rest of the world. His response may have been enough to send most people away, but not this woman. She responded by falling on her knees before Jesus and begging for help. That is when Jesus said, "**It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs.**" Talk about a put down. But the woman wouldn't give up. So she answered, "**Yes, Lord, but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table.**" It was at that point that Jesus said, "**Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted.**" And her daughter was healed.

The Canaanite woman climbed out on a limb called faith. She had faith in Jesus as Lord. She had faith that even a few crumbs that Jesus could toss her was would be enough to help her daughter. She had faith that God's love was not limited but that it extended to her and her daughter. A lot of people talk about having faith. They have faith that things will work out. But things don't always

work out. They have faith in humanity, that people will do the right thing. People don't always do the right things. This woman put her faith in Jesus and it was rewarded.

This Canaanite woman can teach us some basic rules about climbing out on a limb. First, we climb out on a limb because that is where the fruit is. The fruit is not on the roots. The fruit doesn't grow on the trunk. The fruit grows on the limbs. The fruit of faith comes from trusting God, from opening our hearts and lives to the work of God's Spirit. We receive the fruit of faith when we trust the Lord, when we climb out on a limb to be with Him, to learn from Him, to follow Him. The fruit of faith doesn't come by giving up or playing it safe.

Second, when it comes to climbing out on a limb, we have to go out on a big one. Some branches that we're tempted to climb on just won't support us. The pagan religion of the Canaanites couldn't help the woman who came to Jesus for help. Climbing out on a limb called power, pleasure or possessions can't really support us either. Power is not only temporary, it can also corrupt. Pleasures fades, leaving us always wanting more. Possessions never satisfy because they always leave us wanting more. These limbs are all too small. The one limb that is big enough for us all is the limb called faith in Jesus Christ.

Third, if there isn't any fruit on it, then don't go out on that limb. We all know about fruitless endeavors in life. If something sounds too good to be true, it probably is. If someone tells you that you'll make it big by investing in their program, it is probably a pyramid scheme and they plan to make their money off of you. If the advice you're receiving calls for you to compromise yourself, it's not going to produce anything good for you. To put it very simply, staff off the fruitless branches or limbs of life.

Like the Canaanite woman, we can climb out on the limb called faith in Jesus because he went out on a limb for us. His journey out on that limb, on the cross for us, was very productive. The fruits of that limb are love, forgiveness, hope and peace. Jesus acted in love for us when He died in our place and paid the price for our sins. Because of the victory that Jesus won over sin and death, we are forgiven and free in Christ. We are no longer slaves to sin. The fruitless way of life has no power or control over us. Jesus gives us hope, the hope that doesn't disappoint us. The Canaanite woman wasn't disappointed and we won't be either because we know in the long run that Jesus loves us and has the very best in store for us. You can be afraid if you climb out on the wrong limb, afraid it can't support you. But we aren't afraid when we climb out in faith on the limb called Jesus because not only can he support us, but he also gives us the peace of God and peace with God. What more could we ask?

Because Jesus went out on a limb for us, we can go out on a limb for others. We can forgive others because God forgives us. We can serve others because Jesus came as the servant of all. We can even climb out on the limb call witnessing for the Lord because Jesus sends us, gives us His Spirit and wants everyone to hear the Good News and believe in Him. Being out on a limb is a good thing as long as the limb is called faith and the person on the limb with you is Jesus. Amen.