

# Open Hands Matthew 15:21-28

Pastor Bill Mosley 8-16-2020

An old Andy Griffith episode has a young family, renting a house from an elderly, rich landlord. The family falls behind in their rent, the man wants them evicted, comes to Andy because it's the Sheriff's job to do that. Andy keeps trying to avoid it, pleads the case for the family, give them more time. The father is out of work but is known to be a hard worker, etc. The landlord will have none of it, he's right, by the law, and he wants them out.

Then Andy uses loopholes in the law, the contract has to be read and somehow the father's eyeglasses are missing (Andy hid them), etc. But the landlord reads the contract to the family.

Finally after about a week, Andy runs out of excuses. He knows that it's wrong, but he's bound by the law to evict this family. So he tells the landlord he's going to evict them today, and he brings the landlord along.

Andy is very rude and harsh to the family, "Come on you lazy good for nothings" "Get out of here" etc. completely out of character, even the landlord is taken aback at the harshness and rudeness and ends up intervening on the family's side!

Which is of course what Andy wanted, for the landlord to see how cruel he was being. In typical American sitcom fashion, the whole episode only takes 30 min. and has a happy ending, but it was one of the better episodes. 249 wds

And it's a good example of what's happening in today's GOSPEL. Remember, we're reading through Matthew's gospel in a semi-continuous fashion. We're in the section recognized to be Matthew's collection of Jesus' ideas on what the church should be. You can see the progression of Matthew's thought -- for it is Matthew who arranges these stories in the order he wants us to see them.

In his own hometown, Jesus can do no miracles and is rejected. Then John the Baptist is beheaded. Jesus tries to withdraw, or retreat.

The crowds follow him and he heals and teaches, and feeds the crowd. He is able to retreat. Somehow he is empowered, and the disciples see him walk on water. In the feeding of the crowd and the walking on water, the issue is the faith of the disciples. Then there is an argument with the Pharisees, and an explanation given to the disciples: Obeying the law, being self-righteous, this is not what faith is. Faith is love and courage and acceptance, what you do and who you do it to, not what you eat and when you eat it.

Jesus is still trying to withdraw and retreat, to vacation, if you will. He gets away from the scribes and the Pharisees, even the people of Israel and Judah by crossing into Tyre and Sidon. He meets this Canaanite woman, does some more healings, then he repeats the miracle of feeding the crowd. There are some more events and sayings about bread and faith, and then the great chapter on forgiveness, Matthew 18.

This Canaanite woman is a foreigner, she's unclean. She's a woman, and so again, to be avoided by a Hebrew man. But she's in trouble, she's desperate, at the end of her rope. She has nowhere else to turn. She's persistent and making the disciples nervous. "Come on, Jesus," they say, "give her what she wants and get rid of her."

At the feeding of the 5,000, they said, "Just send the crowds away." In the next feeding miracle, Jesus says, before they have a chance to say what they're thinking, "I'm unwilling to send them away hungry." He really doesn't want us to send anyone away. For whatever reason, no matter who they are.

Some have taken exception to Jesus manners with the Canaanite woman. He answers not a word, Matthew says. That's what a good Jew would do, that's important to Matthew, we know. When the disciples beg him to send her away, he quotes something, maybe a proverb about the messiah, maybe what the disciples themselves have been saying. "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." I expect he's toying with the disciples, Like sheriff Andy and the landlord. He's saying, "Yeah, right." He knows where he's going with this. She says, "even the dogs get the crumbs that fall from the master's table."

It doesn't matter that she's an outcast, and scum. She's asking for the Lord's help.

If we could listen to each other, maybe we'd allow an opening to being changed. The first act of compassion is a listening ear. Didn't Jesus demonstrate it in his change of heart with the Canaanite woman!

She could have stiffened up and shook her fist and walked away grumbling. I suspect the surprise of this Gospel for us in 2020 is that she DOESN'T! But, instead, she waits patiently for the love she knows will come; she waits with open hands for even the "crumbs."

who is there that doesn't need God?

**Who are we to withhold God's love from anyone seeking it? Are we better than Jesus? The whole point of Jesus' life is to give himself away. He calls us to give ourselves away, even to the outcasts.**

***"The Hand Painfully Open" (K. Koyama, Lexington Theological Quarterly):***

"With our hand clenched in a fist we cannot so much as pick up an orange or a boiled egg from the breakfast table. With a fist we cannot open a faucet or wash dishes or our face. Cooking and laundering cannot be done with hands closed in a fist. In terms of everyday human operations, our fists are singularly ineffective. We use our open, active hands to do almost everything we do. The fist, so unpractical and ineffective, is a symbol of power. When a hand closes in a fist, the fingers disappear and there is a sense of closedness."

**When you have endured long hopelessness, when every attempt to find help has ended in disappointment and humiliation, you can curl up and die, go away at the first rebuff, maybe even not dare to ask again.... or you can seize every possibility, every faint ray of hope, never asking whether it can deliver, just doggedly refusing to let it go until it has yielded all it has. Both are responses born of desperation. But they take that desperation in very different directions. I have prayed those I-won't-let-go-til-you-bless-me prayers; and I have been in the place of wringing every bit of juice from the least possibility of help or change. I call that faith, even when I do it with not much feeling of hope. So does Jesus.**

There's an old saying, when you're at the end of your rope, tie a knot and hang on. I know that most people get in the habit of self-reliance and self-centeredness, until somehow, they come to the end of that road and find that it's a road to nowhere. And the only thing left to do, the only place left to turn, is to say, "**Lord help me.**"

And that's faith. And God's people are the ones who know who to call on with open hands. And in Christ, God puts bread in the open hands.

Lord, help us to come to you with open hands, and to open our hands to all others who open their hands to you, that we may say no to everything that makes it more difficult to say yes to you.