

The Real Place We Meet God

Series: Conversations with Jesus

March 18, 2018 – Brad Bailey

Matthew 15:21-28 (NLT)

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Intro:

Sometimes when I have a chance to introduce someone to someone else...I like to note a point of connection. (Last week I introduced Ron who plays drums with Jonathan a worship leader.) Past holidays... we had both our annual Christmas Dinner Party for our staff...and another holiday party for our neighborhood. Well the night of the staff dinner party... house is full ...everyone chatting ...when door rings and our neighbors next door come in... we began talking...and wondering...they were looking around ...no one appeared to be a neighbor...staff quite welcoming...but didn't know who they were. Finally we discovered they had gotten the wrong invitation. Right place...but not the right grounds for connection.

The place we meet someone is not just a location...but ground on which we meet.

This is true with God.

When we approach the idea of meeting with God... do we come as one who feel obligation...meeting with one who is owed our time? As one who seeks more meaning with the one who offers meaning? As one who has some practical needs...coming to one who might solve their problems? All these and more are true. All of these provide some ground for meeting God... a ground for connection. But there may be one more fundamental...one that Jesus understood as most essential

We are **continuing our series**... "Conversations with Jesus"...

As described in previous weeks... many conversations are just polite exchanges. Some are practical exchanges. But there are **some that can be life altering**. They can **change our understanding of life...and ourselves**. Some have an expansive effect as what they posit is shared with others.

Arguably...no conversations have changed more people than those with Jesus.

Today we engage one such conversation.

Matthew 15:21-28 (NLT)

Then Jesus left Galilee and went north to the region of Tyre and Sidon. ²² A Gentile woman who lived there came to him, pleading, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David! For my daughter is possessed by a demon that torments her severely." ²³ But Jesus gave her no reply, not even a word. Then his disciples urged him to send her away. "Tell her to go away," they said. "She is bothering us with all her begging." ²⁴ Then Jesus said to the woman, "I was sent only to help God's lost sheep—the people of Israel." ²⁵ But she came and worshiped him, pleading again, "Lord, help me!" ²⁶ Jesus responded, "It isn't right to take food from the children and throw it to the dogs." ²⁷ She replied, "That's true, Lord, but even dogs are allowed to eat the scraps that

fall beneath their master's table.”²⁸ “Dear woman,” Jesus said to her, “your faith is great. Your request is granted.” And her daughter was instantly healed.

For those who are familiar with the life and nature of Jesus...this can seem like an unusual exchange.

The way that Jesus initially relates to this woman **can seem to different** that one might think it **doesn't fit**... maybe it was inserted.

But I believe what we find is **a moment in which Jesus sees something and takes his time** to pull on a string to see what is there...because it has the potential to bring out into the open something for all to see.

It was a **common part of a rabbi teaching his disciples** through **real life situations**. That is **why they did life together** during years of training. [1]

Jesus was constantly doing it. What was so **distinct** was **not how** he did it but **what he did**. **WHAT** he did and then taught **transcended the bound of common religious understanding**.

(On screen for reference, not fully read again)

Matthew 15:21-22 (NLT)

*Then Jesus left Galilee and went north to **the region of Tyre and Sidon**.²² A **Gentile woman who lived there came to him**, pleading, “Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David! For my daughter is possessed by a demon that torments her severely.”*

Jesus left Galilee... and the context is that the crowds were becoming more intense...after thousands came and he ministered on a hillside... he had miraculously provided food...and now he is trying to get away.

So Jesus **heads north to spend** time with his core group of disciples... about 50 miles north... the farthest north he would ever travel. It is the only time in this gospel account that he goes outside of Jewish / Samaritan territory except to escape Herod as a baby and to visit Gadara.

Mark tells us in his gospel that Jesus **did not want anyone to know where he was**. And yet, his **notoriety has become inescapable**.

It is here that this woman encounters him.

What was her position before this group of Jewish men?

She was a woman.

In this time period, women were considered no more than property.

Christ broke such barriers ... his broke that social barrier in making Mary & Martha part of his team... engaging women publicly... standing up for the woman trapped in adultery (who would

become one of his loyal followers)... following his resurrection making his first appearance to a woman who he would tell to share the news to the others (when women were not even accepted as witnesses in the local system.)

She was a Gentile – God had made a covenant with Israel... The Jewish people...and she had no part in that. She **had no covenant rights...or claim.**

She was a Canaanite

The Canaanites were an **idolatrous people** that were **Israel’s ancient enemies**. When the people of Israel entered into the Promised Land, it was the Canaanite people that would have to contend with. [2]

The Canaanite religion was basically that of a **fertility cult**. It is very possible that this woman had been a Temple prostitute and that the child was a product of that lifestyle.

**> She had no pretense of rights...merits...of deserving anything.
More importantly... she knew it.**

(On screen for reference, not fully read again)

Matthew 15:21-22 (NLT)

*Then Jesus left Galilee and went north to **the** region of Tyre and Sidon. ²² A Gentile woman who lived there came to him, **pleading**, “**Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David!** For my daughter is possessed by a demon that torments her severely.”*

O Lord, Son of David

“Lord”...it’s not always referring to God Himself...but at least to one of a higher position. It is the second title that catches attention – **“Son of David.”** According to the religious authorities it was **the title for the Messiah.** [3]

How would this non-Jewish woman know such a title? Though Jesus is outside of his native land, still this Gentile district borders Galilee and word spread. Likely she heard of it as the news got around about Jesus’ miraculous powers. That is why she has come in the first place. She heard the title Son of David and probably knew that it was tied up in the hopes of a Jewish Messiah.

Here was **someone who would save her daughter.** To that belief she attached her hope and would not let go.

She declares who he is...and pleads for mercy: “*Have mercy on me*”

What she declares roots her position...Mercy....

Mercy defines our position before God... the very nature of knowing Him for who He is and ourselves for who we are.

Greater knowledge about God is rich and rewarding...but there is no substitute for this.

When we know we are the undeserving...who must seek mercy... we have the what is most fundamental.

She doesn't have any rights...she doesn't demand anything...what she has is a need. A daughter.

(On screen for reference, not fully read again)

Matthew 15:21-22 (NLT)

*Then Jesus left Galilee and went north to the region of Tyre and Sidon. ²² A Gentile woman who lived there came to him, pleading, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David! **For my daughter is possessed by a demon that torments her severely.**"*

This mother then presents her need – **"my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon."**

We don't know exactly how such oppression what being **manifested**. If like other examples known then and now...it may have been violent seizures (Matthew 17) or self-inflicting insane behavior. (Matthew 8)

By the intensity of her words...and her pleading... we can only imagine it has been torturous to watch her little girl suffer.

She is desperate for her to be healed - to be free.

What we can presume is that she had sought help from every source possible...doctors of her day... the pagan priests of her culture... and no one had the power to save her daughter.

But **now she sees the hope that lies beyond the boundaries of human sources...** she has hope in the God of Israel, hope in the Messiah. And it is a **faith without shame**.

She didn't care that the disciples didn't approve. She didn't care, even as a woman approaching men who were strangers, that she would stand out like a sore thumb. She didn't care about the things that often make us ashamed. She had the faith of a desperate mother - a faith without shame.

She screamed out to them – filled with desperation and faith.

Jesus has been engaging such needs across Galilee. He has engaged the pain that spiritual oppression bore. Which makes his initial response surprising...

(On screen for reference, not fully read again)

Matthew 15:23-28 (NLT)

But Jesus gave her no reply, not even a word. Then his disciples urged him to send her away. “Tell her to go away,” they said. “She is bothering us with all her begging.”

There is **no way to know why** Jesus **initially says nothing**. We know the silence was obvious because **John recalls it**.

It may be that he was **processing this moment**. It’s helpful to realize that he bore the full character of God...but had entered the finite realm of humanity. So he was dependent on discerning the moments.

What we do know us that the silence **was creating even more intensity**...and the disciples would finally speak up... they **wanted the begging to go away**.

Again I don’t presume to know what Jesus saw in this...but I think there is one likely element....there was **something in her cry** that **pierced the presumptions** that so many had.

He sees the **self-righteousness of the religious**... who have become proud.

From the larger contexts we discover how the crowds were beginning to come for the wrong reasons...to fill their stomachs... however short sighted it was. [4]

He knew inside... he would bear the reality of God’s love willing to suffer and die for those in need...but whose grasp of that need is shallow.

Her plea for mercy... it may have reflected the **reality he knew was at hand...far more than what most seemed to grasp**.

So as her words pierce... **he lets them carry on**.... the distinction grows...and his disciples complain... “She is begging” ...and she doesn’t deserve the attention.

His response may **not** have been to **destroy her faith**...but to **explore it**.

When he finally speaks... he challenges her why she would presume to deserve his attention. So he finally engages her....

(On screen for reference, not fully read again)

Matthew 15:24-26 (NLT)

²⁴ Then Jesus said to the woman, “I was sent only to help God’s lost sheep—the people of Israel.” ²⁵ But she came and worshiped him, pleading again, “Lord, help me!” ²⁶ Jesus responded, “It isn’t right to take food from the children and throw it to the dogs.”

Two things he says that seem **hard and harsh** to understand.

Verse 24 - Then Jesus said to the woman, “I was sent only to help God’s lost sheep—the people of Israel.

We may think... I thought he came to love the whole world... why does he make such an exclusionary statement?

There is nothing ultimately exclusionary here at all... ultimately just the opposite. The storyline of God is clear...there is process.

Into a world full of religions... God came not just to Israel...but **to all people... through revealing Himself** initially to **One people**.

The larger story was ALWAYS there...

Jesus comes to finish that story and it was not the Jewish story but the human story...and that is part of what he would finish... is correcting that exclusionary error.

The world lived under the **deception of capricious gods**... and **he was jealous** for the goodness of God the Father. So **he presses** her to **make it clear** that this is **not** a matter of **just some power** ...some magic... **it is the true and living God** who is distinct from all others.

If you have a need...and you seek “whoever” can fix it... mercy may be extended but it will never be fully experienced...because the help was the end in itself... you mutter “thanks” and get on.

Salvation is rooted in the One who has been revealing Himself to THESE people.

Her response?

She **moves forward**... knelt in worship and spoke the **most appropriate three words** that could be spoken...“**Lord...help me.**”

No argument about fairness.

No defensive anger.

Just complete recognition in two things: she has a need...and she honors him as the source...even accepting that he represents the God who she has no covenant relationship with.

Then he uses the **derogatory language by which Gentiles** were spoken of as **“dogs.”** [6] **Some note** that Jesus chose a **more endearing term...** rather than the term usually used of a typical mongrel... he used the term that refers to a house pet. Perhaps he is offering a warmer version...as if to say...

“I have come to those who God has initially chosen... and must see that they are served first. While you may ultimately have a place in the household... why would it be right to redirect my attention from those who God has formed an initial covenant with?”

Still a hard statement. He is pulling on the string of how deeply she understands that she has no claim...no right to demand.

Jesus is using this to draw out what she seems to realize and represent... that the most essential need we have is mercy...and mercy is rooted in knowing one is undeserving.

At this point one can only wonder what is in her. **Will her pride** declare: “Don’t talk to me that way. I’m no dog!”

Rather remarkably... she **never got angry, never accused** him of unfairness... never took offense. [5]

She **doesn’t contend** with what Jesus has said. She **doesn’t dispute** what Jesus has said.

How does she respond? She expands the potential that lies in God.

She replies...

Matthew 15: 27 (NLT)

She replied, “That’s true, Lord, but even dogs are allowed to eat the scraps that fall beneath their master’s table.”

In other words, “Your blessing is so great that **I’ll gladly take the leftovers** and be satisfied.”

She said in essence, “True Lord, I have no claim on you. I am just a Gentile. But I believe that God’s mercy in is the only hope I have...and is even greater than my merits...and I’m appealing to you for that.”

Jesus has been pulling on the string... and what **ultimately comes out...**is her **profound sense of God and ourselves.**

What she has faith in... has nothing to do with her...it has to do with God.

You can imagine You can imagine a smile emerging in Jesus' face ... as he reaches down... helped her off her feet, looked her in the eye and said,

Matthew 15: 28 (NLT)

“Dear woman,” Jesus said to her, “your faith is great. Your request is granted.” And her daughter was instantly healed.

Why was her faith deemed great? Because she presumed nothing about her merits and everything about God's mercy.[7]

Truly great faith is that which believes not in our merits but in God's mercy... His mercy on the undeserving who seek it.

There's an **old Dennis the Menace cartoon** in which Dennis and his friend Joey were walking out of Mrs. Wilson's house with cookies in both hands. Dennis's friend wondered what they had done to deserve the cookies. Dennis explained, "Mrs. Wilson doesn't give us cookies because we are nice. We get cookies because Mrs. Wilson is nice."

Joey was pondering his goodness...Dennis knows real goodness...and who is being nice. Both had cookies...but only truly experienced the kindness.

There can be no experience of mercy if we believe we have a right to what we are given.

God has mercy on the undeserving who seek mercy.

Where did she meet God? It wasn't in Canaan...it was in mercy.

It begins with a woman so desperately in need of God...so deeply aware of her need...and the process was that which brings out the place we can meet with God. [8]

What appears to be rejection... was actually an invitation to reality.

What does Jesus want us to hear in this exchange?

Now Jesus says... “What about you?” Are we able to join this woman in the place and posture of mercy?

Mercy is the place we meet God. There is no other place.

Three questions can ask ourselves.

1. Do I embrace the need for mercy and grace?

Jesus bears amazing news for sinners. His every merciful act of compassion...and his every teaching declare God has come.

The Parable of the Tax Collector and the Pharisee concludes with the tax collector's powerful words of repentance echoing in our ears: **“God be merciful to me, a sinner!”**

Parable of the Prodigal Son... declares how God welcomes repentant sinners with abundant mercy, but the **self-righteous exclude themselves** from His mercy.

We live in which it's harder to see ourselves. We take selfies of ourselves but master being critics of everyone else.

It's not that there isn't decency to appreciate...it's that it is more shallow than we want to recognize.

If it's hard to embrace that you are a sinner...

Try being really good for a week.

Try orienting your life around the true source and center...which is God...rather than yourself.

If we don't grasp how defiant we are and desperate we are for mercy... it's like us looking at Jesus heading towards the utter brutality of being cast out and crucified...and saying..."Awwwww you don't have to do that."

Isaiah 53:6 (AMP)

All of us like sheep have gone astray,

We have turned, each one, to his own way;

But the Lord has caused the wickedness of us all - our sin, our injustice, our wrongdoing...To fall on Him ...instead of us.

The Gospel...which simply means Great news...Breaking Good News...is that

“We're far worse than we ever imagined, and far more loved than we could ever dream.”

2. Do I express the need for mercy and grace?

Did you catch how mercy is far more a fundamental posture more than a complicated sophisticated understanding.

Her faith reminds us that **faith does not have to be sophisticated**, merely the simple belief that God has sent one to save us.

Her worship consisted of three simple words — “**Lord, help me.**” These three words are pregnant with truth.

So many today think that you have to say just the right words at just the right time in just the right place in order to be saved.

This mother didn’t know all the “churchy” words and vocabulary.

God is not listening for you to say the right words. He is more interested in the attitude of your heart.

For the person that doesn’t know Christ as his Savior, **God is not listening for a flowery prayer** ...that uses King James English.

May we join this woman in such a prayer: “**Lord, help me.**”

If we can’t say this prayer...we may not do well with others.

3. Do I extend the need for mercy and grace?

Jesus was quite clear....

Matthew 5:7 - “*Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.*”

The ultimate test of whether we really “get” the reality of mercy...is if we give mercy. If we cannot relate mercifully with others...then we don’t grasp the mercy we need. If you get mercy...we will be merciful. [9]

As an underserving one...my posture towards others is not bound within merits.

Some of us know how true and how hard this is. It’s hard for some of us to not become those who seem to bound within the alternative: Blessed are those who prove themselves worthy by their merits; for they will be judged by their merits.”

The truth is that those who are most critical of others... are most critical of themselves. Those who have a hard time with grace for others, have a hard time accepting God’s grace for themselves.

Martin Luther... the great reformer... wrote: *Now I should like to know whether your soul, tired of its own righteousness, is learning to be revived by and to trust in the righteousness of Christ. Beware of aspiring to such purity that you will not wish to be looked upon as a sinner, or to be one. For Christ dwells only in sinners.*

When Martin Luther died, they found a piece of paper in his pocket that read: "This is true. We are beggars."

May we grasp that we are all beggars ...that the place we meet God is on the only grounds we can...which is the place of mercy.

Closing Prayer:

Resources:

I found helpful ideas from Nickolas Kooi "Beggar"; D Marion Clark "A Bold Woman," Larry Norman message "A Lesson Of Faith From A Faithful Mother"; Clair Sauer message "Radical In A Big Way"

Notes:

1. For a good assessment of options for why Jesus speaks harshly as he does here, and that the "teaching" purpose is most likely central, see Perplexing Passages by Jimmy Agan at <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/the-shocking-words-of-christ/>

2. The infamous historian Josephus once wrote "...of the Phoenicians it is known the Tyrians have been most of all in the same ill disposition towards us:" (Apion Book 1). It was in Tyre where Jesus encountered this woman after He had gone out of Jewish territory and into Phoenician territory where the Sidonians and Tyrians lived.

3. This journey and encounter comes shortly after Jesus had miraculously fed 5,000...and he recognized that the people were coming ever more intently as much for the "goods" than our of repentance seeking mercy. John 6:26 (NIV) – Jesus answered, "Very truly I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw the signs I performed but because you ate the loaves and had your fill.

4. Matthew's gospel opens with these words: "The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham" (1:1). The title will appear a number of times, some with people asking the same thing as this woman – for the Lord, Son of David, to have mercy. According to the religious authorities it was the title for the Messiah. Jesus asked them: "What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?" They said to him, "The son of David" (22:42).

5. Her persistent faith has often been seen as embodying the what Jesus described in a parable about such a woman. Luke records it in 18:1-8.

Similarly, there is a unique boldness of faith here. It could be said that she argues with Jesus and wins. This has been likened to Abraham reasoning with God on behalf of Sodom. The Lord has

told him that he plans to destroy Sodom if it proves to be as wicked as the reports are made out to be. Abraham knows that this does not bode well for the city and is particularly concerned for his nephew Lot who lives there. So he contends with God to hold off judgment if an increasingly lower number of righteous people can be identified. (Genesis 18:23-26). Abraham goes on to whittle down that number. How about 45? 40? 30? 20? All the way to 10. And the Lord agrees. We know that not even ten righteous persons were found but Lot was saved because God did remember the intercession of Abraham. What we take from Abraham, but even more from this woman, is that, far from being displeased by our prayer requests, the Lord is pleased that we come to him... when we don't argue based on our rights... but our needs and God's mercy. There is also the story in Genesis when Jacob meets man at Jabbok. He realizes afterwards that it is God. He says: I met God face-to-face and lived.

He met this man and he wrestled with him all night. When it was almost the daylight, the man said, "let me go, " a Jacob would not quit wrestling. It says the man reached out and touched his hip, crippling him.

Even at the point to Jacob says, " I will not let go and until you bless me." he and He When the man saw that Jacob would not quit, he blessed him. He gave him a new name.... Israel.... Because he wrestled with God and man and prevailed. The name Israel means one who wrestles with God.

Why does God rest with Jacob? Obviously, God wouldn't have a problem winning the match, so why does he wrestle with him all night long? Why didn't he just give him the blessing? God prizes a greatness in the human spirit that will not give up. Of the things that God wants in his children is greatness of soul: people who will endure and wrestle and persevere refuse to quit,

6. Noted by John Williams in message "Jesus And The Canaanite Woman"

Jesus called this woman a dog. To call someone a dog in that time was an insult. To call someone a dog in modern is also an insult. To call someone a dog in those days was to imply that a person or persons were impure and unclean. The Jews spoke of the Gentiles in this way--- dogs. There are two Greek words for dog. Kuon was used metaphorically which meant a street dog that was a scavenger and unclean. The other Greek word for dog is Kunarion which meant little dog or puppy. The Kunarion was the type of dog that was a house pet whereas a Kuon would have been a stray dog that was not tame. Even though Jesus called this woman a dog, He referred to the house pet variety.

7. There are two times in the gospel in which Jesus is blown away with the faith shown in him. This one and that of the centurion. In both cases the believer is a Gentile, someone outside of the covenant people. They are individuals who don't belong to the house of Israel, people who are not children of Abraham. They demonstrate what the Apostle Paul would later pronounce clearly:

Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying,

“In you shall all the nations be blessed.” So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith (Galatians 3:7-9).

8. This story really doesn't conclude here...it appears that Jesus extends this encounter by receiving masses in this area. As one explains:

It's often thought that the Christian faith didn't spread to the Gentiles until after Pentecost with Peter and Paul. And certainly God used Peter and Paul to do this, but it started with Christ himself! Jesus healed the woman's daughter. But like all people who are healed and saved by Christ, the woman and her daughter did not keep this good news to themselves. For we read in verse 29 on that Jesus went from there “up on a mountainside and sat down.” And what happens in this dark, pagan, Gentile land? “Great crowds came to [Jesus], bringing the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute and many others, and laid them at his feet; and he healed them.” And then we are told that these supposed dogs; these folks who the religious leaders thought were so dirty, awful, undeserving, and beyond redemption; well, they “praised the God of Israel.”

Then, as Jesus had done for 5,000 Israelites, excluding women and children who weren't counted just a chapter before—Jesus did for 4,000 Gentiles, besides women and children. He had compassion on them and fed them! And he stayed with them for three days. And this is indeed, the most radical thing which has ever happened in human history up to this point! It is also one of the clearest moments in the Gospels, perhaps with the exception of the Samaritan Woman at the Well, where we are told God does not play favorites and we are not to play favorites either! – From <https://viewsofthesteeples.wordpress.com/2011/08/15/radical-in-a-big-way/>

9. Jesus teaches how mercy cannot be truly received if it is not given in The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant. See Matthew 18:21-35

Philip H. Towner - <https://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionary/mercy/>

The awareness in Judaism and early Christianity of the responsibility to show mercy is evident in the practice of almsgiving (eleemosyne [[e|lehmosuvnh](#)]), a term developed from eleos [[e|leo](#)"]. This expression of mercy in the form of charitable giving might be driven by wrong motives ([Matt 6:2-4](#)), but in Luke's writings especially it is cited as an example of true spirituality. Thus in Luke 11:41 the value of giving alms is placed high above religious rules about purity, which the Pharisees guarded so carefully. In 12:33 mercy expressed in charitable giving is made a characteristic of discipleship. This specific way of showing mercy is praised in the early church ([Acts 9:36](#) ; [10:2](#)) and clearly regarded as an aspect of the normal Christian life (cf. [Acts 24:17](#)). In this way Christians become living signs of God's perfect mercy introduced in Christ and one day to be fully realized (cf. [Acts 3:3](#) [Acts 3:6](#)).

In more general terms, to show mercy is a characteristic of life in God's kingdom, a demonstration of kingdom power. The beatitude (an announcement of blessing) in Matthew 5:7 indicates that showing mercy is one of the marks of righteousness, the gift of God associated with the inbreaking of God's kingdom. God has made it possible; therefore his people must do it.

In so doing, they mirror the God who has saved them ([Luke 6:36](#) ; cf. the opposite picture in [Matt 18:33](#) ; [James 2:13](#)). To illustrate fulfillment of the half of God's law given to direct human relationships, Jesus told the parable of the good Samaritan. Thus, showing mercy to our "neighbors" is part of the basic response of God's people to his covenant ([Luke 10:25-37](#) ; cf. [Lev 19:17-18](#) ; [Deut 6:4-5](#)). Compassion and merciful action in behalf of those around us are the essence of spiritual living. The absence of mercy is a sign of unbelief and rejection of God ([Romans 1:28](#) [Romans 1:31](#)). The Jews were reprimanded for emphasizing cultic Acts and ignoring mercy toward one another ([Hosea 6:6](#)). Jesus took up this reprimand to denounce the legalistic practices of the Pharisees ([Matt 9:13](#)). True Christian faith produces genuine compassion and fruit in the form of Acts of mercy toward those in need. It was this characteristic of mercy that caused Christ to go among all kinds of people to help. Believers are to respond to the mercy shown them in the same way.

10. This quote from Martin Luther... the great reformer... is from Letter from Luther's Works vol. 48. Letter to George Spenlein, Wittenberg, April 8, 1516. The larger section reads: Now I should like to know whether your soul, tired of its own righteousness, is learning to be revived by and to trust in the righteousness of Christ. For in our age the temptation to presumption besets many, especially those who try with all their might to be just and good without knowing the righteousness of God, which is most bountifully and freely given us in Christ. They try to do good of themselves in order that they might stand before God clothed in their own virtues and merits. But this is impossible. While you were here, you were one who held this opinion, or rather, error. So was I, and I am still fighting against the error without having conquered it as yet.

Therefore, my dear Friar, learn Christ and him crucified. Learn to praise him and, despairing of yourself, say, "Lord Jesus, you are my righteousness, just as I am your sin. You have taken upon yourself what is mine and have given to me what is yours. You have taken upon yourself what you were not and have given to me what I was not." Beware of aspiring to such purity that you will not wish to be looked upon as a sinner, or to be one. For Christ dwells only in sinners.