

Scully has taken up her own new set of habits during this lovely pandemic of ours, and honestly I think her way of coping with the fact that as much as she loves us, even my clingy dog wants her alone time. So now, when the night is winding down and I'm settling in with my book and Ben is playing video games, Scully retreats to what we've starting calling her lair. She's staked a claim over our second bedroom, and there she lays in her own queen size bed all by herself until it's time for bed. However, the other night, we discovered the one thing that can get this dog to emerge from her quiet time...marshmallows.

We've always known she loves marshmallows, however, the events of the other night solidified it. Ben went into the kitchen to get a couple of marshmallows as an after dinner snack, and I kid you not, the second that the plastic of that bag unwrapped itself, all you could hear was the click clack of puppy paws skidding down the hallway, no longer completely passed out asleep because she *knew* the marshmallows were being opened, and she knew that if the marshmallows were being opened, she was going to get some of them. And that's exactly what happened, she skidded herself into the kitchen and then followed Ben out into the living room practically hopping on her back legs in hopes of getting some. And the thing is, she doesn't even get that much when it comes down to it. She gets the tiniest

little corner of a marshmallow and she barely even chews the thing, just swallows it right down, but she *loves* it, and she knows it's hers, and to her it's absolutely what she deserves. If Mom and Dad are having marshmallows, well then dang it, she's also going to have some too, no matter how small her piece might be.

It's something it takes all of us a hot second to learn in life I think, the idea that there are certain things that we simply...deserve. They don't have to be earned or gained or clamored for, they are simply what we deserve as the people, as the children of God that we are. Unfortunately, it's not something that we all always learn or remember frankly, and it's also not something that we acknowledge for everyone else around us. We might be acutely aware of what we deserve, but we want nothing to do with talking about others deserving the same thing. We're much more interested in what they *don't* deserve. Another hard lesson to learn...that others are just as deserving as we are...another hard lesson that even the Son of God, even Jesus had to learn the hard way.

I've said it before and I will say it again...I hate this gospel. I sat there on vacation Monday afternoon and pulled the lessons out, hoping for a few more parables or a few more well known stories to roll with while at the beach, and then I saw what it was and just hung my head and said...crap. I

don't like it because it unsettles me and it challenges me and honestly because I don't like the idea of Jesus being mean to anyone, because for as much as I take great hope from the fact that Jesus knows what it is to be deeply human, I wish we didn't see just how well he knows that. I like the thought that Jesus knows what it's like to mourn, to grieve, to hope, to laugh, to cry, to enjoy a good meal or a perfect nap, I don't like the idea that Jesus knows what it's like to be mean, to be a little spiteful, to get things wrong, to be trite, to blow someone off because of who they are. We all know those feelings far too well, we don't need Jesus to mirror them for us too, and yet that's exactly what we have this morning.

Let's be honest, Jesus falls into the simplest and easiest of human traps this morning...hypocrisy. He spends this huge chunk of time just lambasting the scribes and Pharisees for proclaiming the Law and following God and calling people to account for their sinfulness when they then in turn just do the same things. They will nitpick the Law to death, pointing out failures in eating habits and other purity laws, but refuse to check their own actions when it comes to things that are just a smidge more important, like oppression, injustice, and inequality. Jesus just cannot stand that they can't see what they're doing, that they are blindly leading people astray, claiming that they're the ones following God's word, when in reality, they don't

actually act on God's word at all. He calls them out for not checking the words that come out of their mouths, the things they do that harm people and break their hearts...and then Jesus goes and he does the exact same thing.

Because here's the thing, we can talk about how at this point, it seems like Jesus thinks that his mission is only to save the people of Israel. We can talk about how he thinks he's doing the right thing and following God's call, but that doesn't mean he has to be as completely *mean* to this woman as he is. He calls her a dog, y'all, in a time when dogs were feral, scrounging, unclean animals that prowled the streets for garbage. He tells her she's nothing, that she doesn't matter, that she's undeserving of his time, his attention, his help, honestly that she's undeserving of God's love, grace, care, and salvation. Jesus doesn't check with words coming out of his mouth one ounce. He looks at this woman, this woman who is scared and hurting and longing for help and tells her she's worthless.

And honestly, I have no idea how this woman does what she does, how she stands right in front of the Son of God, this man she knows has power and strength, and she tells him he's wrong. She looks right at Jesus and says she is deserving of what Jesus has to give, regardless of the fact that she's a foreigner, regardless of the fact that she isn't one of the people of Israel, regardless of what Jesus thinks his mission is up to that point,

regardless of the fact that she's a woman daring to speak back to a man, regardless of anything, she is deserving. If my dog can acknowledge that she is worthy of a scrap of marshmallow, then by God, this woman can acknowledge that she is worthy of God's love, and her sick daughter is worthy of Jesus' time and attention.

And the amazing thing is...Jesus listens. He responds to her tenacity and grit and audacity, and it changes everything. From this moment on, Jesus starts preaching to Gentiles, traveling through their towns, treating them as equals, treating them as part of God's people, treating them as worthy, as deserving, as part of his flock, and I dare to say it's all because of this woman who refused to be cowed, who refused to back down from what she knew she deserved.

At the end of the day, I think the reason this gospel unsettles me so much is because it's too real, because we all know what it is to do this to someone else or to have it done to us. The laundry list of people that we treat as though they are undeserving of even a scrap of love, attention, respect, grace, anything, is so long I wouldn't know where to start. Our siblings of color, told they are undeserving because of the color of their skin. Our LGTBTQIA siblings, told they are undeserving because of whom their hearts feel called to love. Our immigrant sibling, told they are undeserving

because their journey to this country isn't the same as everyone else's. Our differently abled siblings, told they are undeserving because their bodies work differently than ours. Our female siblings, told they are undeserving because they are just that, female. Our transgender siblings, told they are undeserving because of their gender identity. I could go on and on with the people that we tell, that we believe, that we treat like they aren't deserving, like they aren't even worthy of acknowledgment, like they don't even deserve the tiniest of scraps, when certainly we deserve the whole five course meal. Like we are somehow the gatekeepers to God's love and we get to dictate who gets some and who gets none and who gets it all.

Well here's the honest truth. We don't. Plain and simple. We unequivocally do not get to say who God loves. We don't get to say how much God loves or what that love looks like or who deserves it and who doesn't. We aren't God, so who are we to think that we get to dole out God's love like it's the last pie left at the buffet table, cutting massive slices for ourselves and leaving slivers behind for everyone else. God's love isn't pie and God's family dinner table doesn't have limited seating or demand reservations. At the end of the day, God gets to love whom God loves and we don't get a say in that. So we can choose to be bitter and snarky and withholding to our siblings, clinging to our false beliefs that who we choose

to love is who God will love too, or we can learn a little bit from Jesus' deeply human self...that we can change, that we can open our hearts up to the reality that God's love is vast and expansive and unrelenting and non-discriminatory and fierce and wild and completely and totally out of our control. We can open our hearts up to the reality that if we believe that God loves us when we are well aware that we are definitely, definitely not perfect, then we can open our hearts to the reality that God can probably love everyone else too.

It's not an easy lesson to learn, there's no doubt about that, because we're human and we tend to roll with our knee-jerk judgments and we frankly like to believe that we're the only ones God adores as wildly as God does. But I cannot help believing that somehow, some way, God's love is powerful enough to overcome even our imperfect hypocrisy, that it's powerful enough to bind us together, to show us that we are deserving of love and *so is everyone else*. I don't know, I can't help but feel like if my exhausted, sleepy dog can learn that she's deserving of marshmallows, then anything is possible, and maybe that's silly, but at the end of the day, God's love is a little silly, because it is joyously, beautifully reckless. So the next time someone says God loves them just as they are...may we all have the audacity to believe them. **AMEN!!!**