

“Open Up!”
Mark 7:24-37
Pollocksville Presbyterian Church
9.5.21

Mark 7:24-37

24 Jesus left that place and went into the region of Tyre. He didn't want anyone to know that he had entered a house, but he couldn't hide. **25** In fact, a woman whose young daughter was possessed by an unclean spirit heard about him right away. She came and fell at his feet. **26** The woman was Greek, Syrophenician by birth. She begged Jesus to throw the demon out of her daughter. **27** He responded, “The children have to be fed first. It isn't right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs.”

28 But she answered, “Lord, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs.”

29 “Good answer!” he said. “Go on home. The demon has already left your daughter.” **30** When she returned to her house, she found the child lying on the bed and the demon gone.

31 After leaving the region of Tyre, Jesus went through Sidon toward the Galilee Sea through the region of the Ten Cities. **32** Some people brought to him a man who was deaf and could hardly speak, and they begged him to place his hand on the man for healing. **33** Jesus took him away from the crowd by himself and put his fingers in the man’s ears. Then he spit and touched the man’s tongue. **34** Looking into heaven, Jesus sighed deeply and said, “*Ephphatha*,” which means, “Open up.” **35** At once, his ears opened, his twisted tongue was released, and he began to speak clearly.

36 Jesus gave the people strict orders not to tell anyone. But the more he tried to silence them, the more eagerly they shared the news. **37** People were overcome with wonder, saying, “He does

everything well! He even makes the deaf to hear and gives speech to those who can't speak.”

The Word of the LORD. **Thanks be to God!**

Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you, O God, our Rock and our Redeemer.

Amen.

Have I ever mentioned to you how much I love the Gospel of Mark?

Mark is short and sweet. Mark also emphasizes Jesus' humanity.

If you can recall, at the beginning of Mark, after Jesus is baptized and driven by the Spirit into the wilderness, he is preaching in Mark

1:14-15:

Now is the time! Here comes God's kingdom! Change your hearts and lives, and trust this good news!

But, you may have noticed that there is no interaction with another party. There isn't a relationship being cultivated until 1:16 and forward when Jesus changes his approach to ministry. Once Jesus comes to where the people are on the shore of the Galilee Sea, once Jesus changes his approach by building relationships, disciples are formed.

Jesus changes his approach to ministry.

Maybe that's why many people don't like Mark's Gospel. Sure, it has its advantages of being the shortest of the Gospels, but when the One who we hold to be God and Human does course corrections in his ministry, it doesn't sit well with us. It doesn't make sense. It's human nature for us to obsess over things making sense. We want

to be able to explain it all away. Yet, the Savior of the World, the Son of God, the Human One, the Prince of Life, the Great Physician changes his approach to ministry.

Yet, I still love Mark.

Here we are in chapter seven. It's not pretty. In fact, it's disturbing and gross. Jesus uses a racial slur against an immigrant. Calling her a dog! And then, reading the other story within the context of a pandemic is frightening! These two stories, however, occur right after Jesus declares all foods clean in Mark 7:19. And if you think about it, things start to make a little more sense.

In Mark 7:24-30, an outsider turns the table on Jesus. If there were certain foods declared unclean, then certainly, people who were not

part of the Jewish faith were not viewed favorably. This woman, this GENTILE, shares the stage with Jesus in this story. At this point, Jesus' mission has been to the Jews and only to the Jews, which is why Jesus would call her a dog.

Yet, despite the insult, this brave woman begs Jesus to heal her daughter:

Lord, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs.

I can't imagine the heartache this woman went through. The heartache of seeing her daughter suffer. The heartache of being on the margins and not part of the dominant culture. The heartache of being a woman in the first century world. Who knows if she had a husband. Who knows if there were a husband if he were truly present. But, like many strong women do, this woman doesn't back

down. She gets in Jesus' face and the mission of Jesus goes from only the Jewish people to the entire world.

Then, there is a deaf man with a speech impediment of indeterminate heritage. Jewish? Gentile? Mix? Who knows. But, we get a bunch of details: Jesus touches the man's ears, spits, puts his fingers on the man's tongue, gives a big sigh, and speaks toward heaven.

But, what links these two stories together? What do these two people have in common? A lot, actually. The woman is definitely an outsider due to her heritage. The man is an outsider due to his physical abilities and probably his heritage, too, we don't know. And these two stories follow Jesus' declaring all foods clean just a few verses before, so we can look at this as Mark expanding on that

statement by using people as examples that Jesus is no longer solely ministering to the Jews, but the entire world.

Jesus changes his approach to ministry.

Mark's Gospel is quite devious when it comes to making a point like this one. In these two stories, Mark tells the audience that there is work to be done in other lands like Tyre and there is work to be done in the areas nearby that are disdained like the region of the Ten Cities. According to Lamar Williamson, Jr., both of these stories "point to the universal scope of God's gracious action in Christ."¹

¹ Lamar Williamson, Jr. *Mark*. Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1983. p.140.

The Church in the United States, especially those who have been accustomed to being a part of the dominant white, English-speaking, Protestant culture, needs to take a serious look at this passage. From the very beginning of time, God has been working in ways that our minds cannot even begin to fathom. And here we are in Mark 7:24-37, there is no limit to God's work in the person of Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world. The Savior of the immigrant who begs Jesus to heal her daughter who has been plagued by demons. The Savior of the deaf man with a speech impediment whose heritage is unknown. The Savior of those who have been marginalized by society due to their own faith, or lack thereof, background. The Savior of those who have been abused by the Church who claim that they were acting out of "love", but were using the Bible as an instrument of terror.

Williamson is right. Today's stories point to the universal scope of God's Love Made Flesh in the One who was and is the Son of God AND the Son of Humanity. There is no limit to God's love. These two stories DEFY any limitations that we dare fool ourselves to believe exist. These two stories push us, as they have our ancestors and will our descendants, to faithfully proclaim and compassionately serve everyone. Everywhere. Every time. Regardless of results. Because, if you didn't notice, we don't know whether the woman, her daughter, or the man continue to follow Jesus. That's not the point. Jesus chose to make their circumstances better. And Jesus revealed his glory to these outsiders because Jesus changed his approach to ministry.

Praise God! Praise God the circle was widened! Praise God the woman was brave enough to confront Jesus! Praise God that Jesus got in the muck with that man! Praise God for the universal

scope of grace that continues to be poured out on us! Praise God for the Holy Spirit who drives us out into these unlikely places with these unlikely people in order to show that God's love is bigger than we ever thought possible!

Siblings in Christ, trust this Good News!

In the name of God the Creator, God the Redeemer, and God the Sustainer. Amen.