

IK Synod Sermon and Prayers
September 5, 2021
15 Pentecost

Our Gospel reading today is found in Mark 7:24-37

The Holy Gospel according to St. Mark the 7th chapter
Glory to you, O Lord.

²⁴From there Jesus set out and went away to the region of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know he was there. Yet he could not escape notice, ²⁵but a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately heard about him, and she came and bowed down at his feet. ²⁶Now the woman was a Gentile, of Syrophenician origin. She begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. ²⁷He said to her, "Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." ²⁸But she answered him, "Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." ²⁹Then he said to her, "For saying that, you may go—the demon has left your daughter." ³⁰So she went home, found the child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.

³¹Then Jesus returned from the region of Tyre, and went by way of Sidon towards the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis. ³²They brought to him a deaf man who had an impediment in his speech; and they begged him to lay his hand on him. ³³Jesus took him aside in private, away from the crowd, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spat and touched his tongue. ³⁴Then looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, "Ephphatha," that is, "Be opened." ³⁵And immediately his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. ³⁶Then Jesus ordered them to tell no one; but the more he ordered them, the more zealously they proclaimed it. ³⁷They were astounded beyond measure, saying, "He has done everything well; he even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak."

The Gospel of the Lord.
Praise to you, O Christ.

Grace to you and peace from God, the Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

In our Gospel reading this week, we have two miracle stories of Jesus healing. It is important to notice that these healings happen in Gentile territory and it is Gentile people who are healed.

Jesus is on the move. Traveling, he set out and went away to the region of Tyre. He needed rest, he was no doubt exhausted. He ducked into a house trying to avoid the crowds. But, he could not escape notice. Even in Gentile territory, Jesus' reputation preceded him.

A woman, so eager for her demon possessed daughter to be healed didn't wait for Jesus to come out of the house. But rather it seems, unannounced and uninvited, she goes into the house and bows down at Jesus feet, begging him to cast out the demon from her daughter.

There is a verbal exchange between Jesus and this woman, a wrestling of sorts, but the woman's persistence and tenacity prevails and Jesus casts out the demon from her daughter. Jesus heals this child.

There are at least two or more interpretations of this verbal exchange between Jesus and the Gentile woman.

One could wonder, if Jesus intentionally insults the woman, knowing that the woman's come back will make a point to those around Jesus. That Jesus knows that the lesson, the point that is made, will be stronger coming from her. The woman certainly makes the point quite well. In fact, what results is not one point, but rather two points being made.

- First, that all people are included in Jesus' ministry and in God's kingdom. God shows no partiality and therefore, Jesus ministry, Jesus life, death and resurrection is for all.
- And, the second point, is about power and wisdom, the power and wisdom of the supposed outsider, the foreigner, the enemy, the supposed second-class person....this woman.

It this what Jesus was up to? Perhaps.

Or on the other hand, one could wonder if Jesus is the student here and the woman the teacher. Is Jesus bogged down in what his teachers in the synagogues had taught him? Teachings about Jews and Gentiles, who's in and who's out. These teaching informing Jesus' reaction about being sent only for the lost people of Israel, the Jews? Does he learn something from the woman in this back-and-forth exchange? Does she make him stop and think? Is she the rabbi, the one who will open Jesus' perspective a bit more? Later in our reading, Jesus says to the deaf/mute man in Sidon, "Be opened!" Could it be that the Syrophoenician woman has already done the same for him? Perhaps.

We may never fully understand the exchange, the verbal wrestlings between Jesus and this woman. But what is clear is that Jesus cast out the demon from her daughter.

Some might say that the woman was a model of determination or verbal dexterity rather than faith. A mother bear, so to speak, fighting for the life of her child showing desperation and tenacity rather than faith.

But when we look at the woman's actions, we find that she indeed demonstrated a deep faith. We might learn from her faith, as well.

Notice the woman's persistence. She refuses to go away until she gets what she came for.

Notice the woman's hopeful insight. She refuses to believe that even a tiny speck of grace isn't out of reach, knowing just a scrap can make the difference for her.

Notice the woman's trusting acceptance. She is willing to take Jesus at his word and journeys home alone to confirm her daughter's healing.

What is faith? Is it a kind of certainty.....the opposite of doubt? Or is faith a type of courage in the midst of doubt or apathy, timidity or fear?

As we consider the Syrophenician woman's actions, we find that faith is bold, daring and insistent. It puts first things first (a child's health, for instance). Faith gathers every resource available, from wit to wisdom, insight to audacity, creativity to risk. It seeks God out with vim and vigor and is not afraid to wrestle, to strive, to struggle with God. Faith is tenacious; faith is living; faith is active.

As our second reading in James puts it, "...faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead." Indeed, we learn about faith, an active faith from this woman.

Faith, the woman's faith, the disciples's faith, our faith, is not about never messing up, not about getting all answers right in life, not about articulating the proper doctrine or theology, not about making all the right choices.

Faith is about going to Jesus and Jesus coming to us, clinging to Jesus, and expecting Jesus to heal, to restore, to save. Looking to Jesus for grace and mercy and love. Faith is not something we can muster up ourselves, not something we can create. Faith is pure and simply....a gift from God.

Faith is living in right relationship with God, a righteousness given to us through Jesus, our Savior. Faith is being washed by the blood of the Lamb and being set free to love God and neighbor. Free to serve God and serve neighbor with all we've got. Faith is the courage to take bold risks knowing that we will make mistakes along the way and these mistakes will be met by the gracious forgiveness of our God.

Faith....in our own deafness, in our own muteness, faith is about being healed by Jesus. "Ephphatha," Jesus says, "Be opened." And we are opened and we can speak.

And then like the crowd being astounded beyond measure, we zealously proclaim what Jesus has done. Sharing this Gospel message in all we say and all we do, in our words and in our deeds.. For.... faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead." Amen.

Prayers of Intercession:

We join together to pray for the needs of the world, concluding each petition with O Lord, hear our prayer.

A brief silence.

God of grace and God of glory, for the church we pray: uphold our bishops, pastors, and deacons; sustain all volunteers during these autumn months; inspire our worship; and teach us how to pray. Our hope is in you, O God:

O Lord, hear our prayer.

Creator of the stars of night, for the earth we pray: lower global temperatures; provide a healthy harvest; protect the habitats of wild animals; and train us to care for your creation. Our hope is in you, O God:

O Lord, hear our prayer.

Mighty Fortress, for the nations we pray: protect the world from tyranny and violence; guide our elected officials; look with mercy on the people of Afghanistan; lead our nation toward the right use of our military; and bring peace to all. Our hope is in you, O God:

O Lord, hear our prayer.

Hope of the world, in this time of pervasive adversity we pray: preserve us from storms and wildfires; be with first responders and those who are recovering from Hurricane Ida; protect us from terrorists; and wean us from the ways of prejudice. Our hope is in you, O God:

O Lord, hear our prayer.

Rock of ages, for laborers we pray: grant a just wage to the employed and meaningful jobs to the unemployed; and shape our society to honor all residents of our land. Our hope is in you, O God:

O Lord, hear our prayer.

O God of love, for those who are poor, we pray: feed the hungry; house all without homes; assist the powerless; and form us into habits of generosity. Our hope is in you, O God:

O Lord, hear our prayer.

Healer of our every ill, for those who are suffering we pray: heal those who have contracted COVID-19; embrace those with mental illness; open up opportunities for persons who are deaf; and hear our cries for those we name here, esp..... Our hope is in you, O God:

O Lord, hear our prayer.

Mothering God, for ourselves we pray: take away our fears; and come to save us. Our hope is in you, O God:

O Lord, hear our prayer.

Eternal Father, strong to save, for the grace shown to our ancestors in the faith, we praise you. For life at the end of time in your presence with all the saints, we pray. Our hope is in you, O God:

O Lord, hear our prayer.

Receive our prayers, O God, for the sake of our beautiful Savior, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Hear us now, Father, as we pray the words that Christ has taught us,
Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come,
thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory,
forever and ever. Amen.

Blessing

People of God, you are Christ's body,
Bringing new life to a suffering world.
The holy Trinity, one God, bless you now and forever.
Amen.

Dismissal

Go in peace. The living Word dwells in you.
Thanks be to God.