

Mark 7:24 says, "Jesus left that place and went to the vicinity of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know it; yet he could not keep his presence secret."

In the first part of our Scripture this morning, Jesus is traveling far from His hometown and even beyond the traditional borders of Israel. He is in the north country, in the area of Tyre and then moves on to Sidon. He is there for two reasons. First, everywhere Jesus went in Judah and Galilee He was drawing large crowds. He needed to get some relief from the press of the crowds. The other reason was opposition. The Pharisees and Scribes were stirring up trouble, making accusations, creating danger. Jesus wanted to let things cool down awhile before continuing His Messianic mission.

When we look at the second part of verse 24, however, we discover that in the providence of His Father, Jesus' quest for privacy would not be fulfilled. It was, in fact, impossible--at least by any human means--for Jesus to hide. Wherever Jesus went, people would find Him out. He couldn't walk fast enough, run fast enough, or even ride fast enough to outdistance the stories of His miracles.

Mark 7, verses 25-26 continue: "In fact, as soon as she heard about him, a woman whose little daughter was possessed by an evil spirit came and fell at his feet. The woman was a Greek, born in Syrian Phoenicia. She begged Jesus to drive the demon out of her daughter."

What is immediately interesting in these verses is that the word of Jesus has already spread beyond the Jewish community and beyond the borders of Israel. A woman who has no claim to the Jewish messiah because she is not Jewish, has heard of Him and is driven by her need to seek His assistance.

What comes next could be troubling. According to verse 27 Jesus says "First let the children eat all they want," he told her, "for it is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs." What is Jesus saying and why is He saying it? "Dogs" was a common and quite pejorative racial slur commonly used by Jews to speak of Gentiles. It's like a white person today using the "n" word in reference to a black person or like a black person calling a white person a honky. Was Jesus a prejudiced bigot? Was Jesus being cruel? This certainly doesn't match the person of Jesus whom we have come to know.

The only light at the end of this puzzle is found in the particular word Jesus uses to address her. The word is not just "dog" as used in

the usual slur, but "little dog," "house dog," or "puppy." Jesus is, in fact, I believe playing with words and with the woman. The image of children with puppies brings a totally different feeling, a decidedly softer spirit to this serious interchange. It makes a big difference depending on what sort of dog you are talking about.

I met a puppy in one of my visits last week. She was cute, cuddly and eager to play. If the owner had wished to give her to me, it would have been an offer hard to resist. But then again, I remember a couple of Rotwilers that were running loose in our neighborhood some time ago. They were big and exhibited a menacing attitude. I could see in their eyes that they didn't see me as a playmate; but, rather, as their next meal. Jesus' word was more equivalent to "playful puppy" than "mean dog."

It is also true that we can't see the open body language, the kind expression on Jesus' face, or the twinkle in His eyes, but we can well imagine them in light of His carefully chosen words. In Mark 7:28, the woman responds to the playful argument that Jesus invites her to engage in: "Yes, Lord," she replied, "but even the (little) dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." The fact that she stays in the conversation, that she calls Jesus "Lord," which is the only time in the whole gospel of Mark that Jesus is addressed as "Lord," and that she is able to give such a good argument in her own defense, is a pretty sure indication that Jesus' words and body language must have given her some encouragement.

Whatever the case, Jesus was pleased. The woman honored Him by believing in His ability to help her daughter. She honored Him by naming Him "Lord." She honored Him by following His lead in the conversation. Jesus had invited her to "dance," and she was a good "dancer." Verses 29 & 30 give us the rest of the story: "Then he told her, 'For such a reply, you may go; the demon has left your daughter.' She went home and found her child lying on the bed, and the demon gone."

The questions that addresses us at this point are "What?" What does this passage of Scripture have to say to us, and "Where?" Where does it engage our lives today? What does it tell us about Jesus? Where does it touch us? The first thing we see is that Jesus cannot be hidden. Wherever Jesus is truly present people will notice Him. They may not know Who He is or what He means but they will notice something special. It's like that little chorus that says, "There's just something about that name."

Betty Jane likes to bake cookies, cakes and pies. And when she's baking she can't keep it a secret. When I come home and walk into the kitchen I know what she's been up to. I can feel the warmth of the oven and smell the aroma in the air. It creates an automatic response in my body: My tummy growls and my mouth begins to water. I'm hungry even if I wasn't hungry before I came through our door.

On the spiritual level, the real Jesus elicits a similar response. If He truly lives in you and me, people will be drawn to the Jesus in us. If He truly lives among us here at Fourth Street--in our fellowship and in our service--people will be drawn to the Jesus who lives among us. If this is not happening we need to be asking "why not?" because this is the way it is meant to be. This is the way it will always be wherever Jesus Christ is present. **Jesus is a people magnet.** The question is, can anyone see Jesus in you, in me, among us? If not, why not? The authentic Jesus cannot be hidden.

A second thing we are reminded of in our Scripture passage this morning is that Jesus is present and available to all people, regardless of race, cultural heritage, gender, or economic status. Jesus was Jewish and came as the Jewish Messiah. As the apostle Paul tells us, Jesus came first to the Jews, to His own people, to proclaim to them the Good News of God's love, forgiveness, and restoration. They were loved. They could be forgiven for their sins. They could be restored in their relationship with their God. They had first dibs on all the spiritual and material blessings of the Kingdom He had come to establish. Healing was theirs, deliverance from bondage to evil was theirs, restored relationships were theirs, eternal life was theirs. It was all theirs in Him. But the kingdom of God would come whether they received it or not. If they would not respond to God's offer, God would find others who would. John 1:11-12 say, "He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God." **Jesus belongs to all who will receive Him.**

A third issue addressed in our Scripture passage this morning is the question of "How;" that is, how are we to receive Him? How can we receive Jesus, and receive from Jesus that which He has come to bring?

As I look at the story of the Syro-Phoenician woman in context, I can't help noticing the contrast between her approach to Jesus and that of the Pharisees and teachers of the Law, whom we encounter at the beginning Mark 7. They knew Scripture, they had every reason to recognize Jesus as Messiah and honor Him. But, they, in their sense of

self-sufficiency, self-righteousness, and arrogance, rejected and despised Him. All they could do was criticize and complain. The Syro-Phoenician woman, however, had no advantage. She hadn't been trained to believe in the God of Israel. She didn't know the promises. She had no preconceived notions, prejudices, or pride. All she had was her great need and hope that this man called Jesus could and would help her if she asked.

In her simplicity, the Syro-Phoenician woman gives us a pattern to follow if we want to come to Jesus. When she heard about Jesus, she didn't waste any time. She went looking for Jesus.

You know, Jesus is here in this house right now. He promised to come wherever we gather and to be with us always. He tells us that He seeks those who worship Him in Spirit and in truth. Take a moment to open yourself up to His presence. Bow your head and close your eyes and pray this prayer after me. **“Jesus, You are here right now. Help me to feel what I know is true. Help me catch the aroma of Your presence. Jesus, come to me, as I seek for You. Amen.”**

The first thing we need to do to receive healing and deliverance is to seek an audience with our risen Lord. The mother in our story today seeks and finds Jesus. The second thing this woman does is to humble herself before Him. Mark 7:25 says, she “came and fell at his feet.” Again we see the contrast with the Pharisees and Teachers of the Law; so proud and full of themselves, they would not bow before anyone. If we want wholeness we need to be broken. Continue in a spirit of prayer: pray after me: **“Jesus, I am not worthy to be in your presence but my need is too great for me to stay away. So, I come humbly. I ask for Your mercy to me a sinner. Amen.”**

The woman in our Scripture today sought and made contact with Jesus, and she humbled herself before Him. The third thing she did was to express her need. Mark 7:26b says, “She begged Jesus to drive the demon out of her daughter.” We notice that this woman came humbly but that she expressed her need fervently. She made her need clear. I am reminded here of the words of James, when he says at the end of James 4:2, “You do not have, because you do not ask God,” or, as it says in the King James Version: ‘Ye have not because ye ask not.’”

I wonder this morning what needs may have come in with you to this worship service. Can you identify a need? Maybe like the Syro-Phoenician woman, you need healing or deliverance for someone you love. Maybe you need deliverance or healing for yourself, healing for

an important relationship, guidance or wisdom for your work or for raising your children. Maybe you are looking for direction for your ministry for the Lord. Can you identify a need? I believe Jesus can meet every need that we bring to Him this morning. Take a moment right now and bring that need to Jesus. You have sought the Lord's presence. You have humbled yourself before Him. Now express that one need that is at the top your list. Speak it to the Lord silently or right out loud, but however you express it, express it clearly and urgently. The Lord knows what you need, but He wants you to be clear about what you are asking. Take the moment. Express your need as I tell Him mine.

The woman in our story found Jesus and humbled herself before Him. She expressed her need and then she did something else: she fought through doubt to claim the object of her desire. No doubt the dilemma Jesus put before her concerning “dogs” and “the children's bread,” raised a few doubts. But, this woman staked her claim on the character and integrity of Jesus; she didn't give in to doubt: “Yes, Lord, but even the dogs get the eat the crumbs.” Jesus was clearly delighted in her answer. Her faith was new but it wasn't fragile.

The point here is that we should not give up when doubts arise. Doubts are to be expected; they are part of the spiritual warfare every Christian is engaged in. We need to be prepared for warfare so that **when doubts arise we will be positioned to cling to the integrity and to the character of Jesus. Worldly friends may prove untrue, but never Jesus.**

The Syro-Phoenician woman came to Jesus and humbled herself before Him and spoke her need; she fought off doubt to receive the object of her desire. She did one more thing that we would do well to follow. She addresses Jesus Christ as “Lord.” This is a sign of submission and surrender. Jesus, You are Lord; You are in the driver's seat not me. Jesus, I've told You what I need and You know what I need and I trust You to give me what I need, but whatever You decide Jesus, You are Lord. My relationship with You Jesus is bigger than my need, and You are good and whatever You decide to give will be good also. We need to remember: **All that Jesus gives will be good.**

We have seen this morning that Jesus cannot be hidden and that He is available to anyone who will come to Him, humble themselves before Him, ask for what they need, fight through their doubt, and name Him Lord. We can be proud and hard like the Pharisees, or we can be like the Syro-Phoenician woman, and name Him “Lord.” Where do you stand with Jesus this morning? How will you respond?

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Sermon for August 27, 2017

How to Connect With Jesus

Mark 7:1-2, 5-13, 24-30

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