

Pastor Jon's Sermon from Sunday, September 8, 2024 based on Mark 7:24-37 "The Syrophoenician Woman".

Our Gospel for today starts off with Jesus wanting to take a break. To have a vacation or some sabbath time after all the preaching, feeding, and healing he was doing. Like many of us when we go on vacation, Jesus had a certain location in mind. He chose the Gentile region of Tyre and Sidon. Interesting choice for a Jewish rabbi to go where most Jewish people would avoid. These were beach towns on the Mediterranean coast near modern day Lebanon. Up north for Jesus. Jesus perhaps wanted to be near water, do some fishing, take off his sandals for a bit. Mark tells us, "He entered a house and did not want anyone to know he was there." Can you relate to Jesus about wanting to get away and take a break?

But when Jesus was in the house, he was discovered. A woman heard that Jesus was there and came and bowed down at his feet. She continually begged Jesus to heal her daughter who had an unclean spirit. We don't know what her daughter had, but she was not well in mind, body, or spirit. This mom was desperate for help and was persistent. The verb for begging here was a continuous begging.

Next Jesus shows his human side as a person growing up in a typical Jewish family. Remember, he is 100 % human and 100 % divine. Knowing she was of Gentile, Syrophoenician origin, he dismissed her request at first.

This is not the neat and tidy Jesus I learned about in Sunday School. He wasn't being kind to her. Jesus called her a dog... a racial slur used by Jews for Gentiles. Jesus saw his mission as going to the children of the house of Israel first... the Jewish people... to reform them.

But this Gentile woman argued with Jesus and won the argument. One of the few in scripture to argue with Jesus and win... essentially saying, "even though you may consider me a dog, even household dogs under the table still eat the children's crumbs." She is right.

If you have or had a dog, you know they love to hang out under the table. We will often say, where is Badger, our Golden Doodle? He is under the table patiently staring at the floor, waiting for a treasure to fall.

The woman essentially argued, “I at least deserve to be treated as well as a household pet.” Jesus agreed. Then from a distance, Jesus healed her daughter. She went home and her daughter was lying on the bed with her unclean spirit gone. Jesus was changed by this woman and honored her request.

I think the gift in this text is that Jesus was opened up to new possibilities. His mind was made up about her at first. But Jesus’ mission was now being expanded to Gentiles right before his very eyes. This text was groundbreaking for the early church and for us today.

This text has changed me big time. It has opened my heart to be more inclusive of all. It allows me to question those times when I think I’m sure about someone or something, dug in on an issue, and will never change my mind. This confirms for me the need for love and inclusion of all people in the church and family, especially those in the LGBTQIA plus community. You may not be there, but scriptures like this one have changed my heart. Loving all people fulfills the royal law as James puts it in our second reading... To love your neighbor as yourself. Who is our neighbor? Everyone. And to love them as yourself is to want for them what you want for yourself.

The scriptures can change our hearts due to the work of the Holy Spirit. They can bring us to a place of repentance create in us a new and right spirit.

May Holy Spirit open our hearts and minds to new possibilities of welcome in our families and in the church. Amen