

September 5, 2021

“Even Jesus Can Have a Bad Day”

Scripture Reading

Mark 7:24–37

From there he 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, but a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately heard about him, and she came and bowed down at his feet. Now the woman was a Gentile, of Syrophenician origin. She begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. He 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.” But she answered him, “Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.” Then he said to her, “For saying that, you may go—the demon has left your daughter.” So she went home, found the child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.

Sermon “Even Jesus Can Have a Bad Day”

This exchange between Jesus and the Syrophenician Woman would have dropped the mouths open of the first century readers. This scandalous, little argument would have kept the early Christians talking for days. You would have heard people saying things like: “Did Jesus just call that gentile woman a dog! Others would say, “how dare she talk back to him like that, that woman does not know her place! Doesn’t she know who Jesus is!?”

This passage has always made biblical scholars nervous on many levels , because it doesn’t make Jesus look perfect and it gives this woman an interesting place in the development of Jesus’s ministry from being just for Jewish people to being also available to Gentiles. It wasn’t until the 1970’s when feminist scholars started pointing out that this woman is a hero. She stands up to Jesus even after he does indeed call her a dog.

There has always been tension between the Jewish people and the gentiles in the new testament stories but here this woman has the audacity to hound Jesus when he is exhausted. He had come a long way to rest and right off the bat someone is trying to get something from him when he feels like he has nothing left to give. What scholars can’t get over is that Jesus isn’t perfect in this passage, his humanity is showing, he is irritable and tired and has nothing left to give and so he snaps at this poor woman, like many of us can do when we are tired and just needing a break.

What I find most important isn't that Jesus has a human moment as much as what he does when he screws up. He makes things right. He doesn't puff out his chest and double down on stupid even though he knows he is wrong. You all know people like that. He lets this woman teach him and he changes his mind. He puts his ego aside and lets himself be teachable.

Can you all image the world right now, how different it would be if people would admit it when they made a mistake, admit that what they said was offensive, admit they were wrong and try to set things to rights. It would be a very different world and, in my opinion, one God would be much more proud of.

That used to be considered an important part of building a good character, to admit when you are wrong, to make amends and set things right. I remember breaking a neighbors garage door window with a baseball. My parents didn't punish or ground me, no they made me go over and apologize, then measure the window, call the hardware store and pay the 16.75. to fix it out of my allowance. I had to make it right that's what we were taught. To take responsibility, to fix things. Raise your hand if that is how you were brought up?

Do you realize how many laws are being passed right now that are about denying things we did wrong as a nation. What the heck are we teaching our kids? Just pretend we didn't make a whole lot of mistakes on our way to form a more perfect union. We have to show our kids that we are willing to own our faults and to make them right. Jesus doesn't tell the woman, "Go your faith has made you well like he usually does" ... He said for saying that, in other words, for having this conversation with me, standing up to me and teaching me something new, for that your daughter is now blessed.

Think about that for a moment, it was in having the hard conversation, for loving her daughter so much that she wouldn't take no for an answer, to point out to Jesus that her daughter did deserve his attention, and for all that her daughter is blessed.

In that beautiful mix of a mother's strength and undeniable courage and faith she is changed and get this-- she changes Jesus. Jesus's ministry to Gentiles really starts to take off at this point, making available to all what had only been available to the children of Israel.

In this world that seems so bent on self destruction, bent on going down in the flames from our inability to be flexible, to compromise, to talk to one another Jesus is showing us it's okay to admit you're wrong and let your mind be changed.

Our communities have become recalcitrant, losing their ability to come up with consensus whether it's mask mandates, voting rights, women's rights, vaccinations. Being right seems to

trump the needs of our children and the needs of the people. There are no happy endings the way we are headed and we all know it and it causes an underlying anxiety in each and every one of us which like Jesus makes us more likely to strike out at one another.

I'm not preaching about politics, I'm preaching about civility. You should not be allowed to identify yourself as a Christian when the tactics you use as a leader to impose your will on others are those of ruffians, miscreants, and down right bullies. That is not loving our neighbor, none of this is about loving our neighbor and none of that is how Jesus taught us.

We have to find another path... as Christians, we are called to the path of peace. We are called to try and model our faith everywhere we go and in all situations, and we are certainly called to listen to one another like Jesus listened to this woman.

You are some of the kindest, loving, most Christian people I have had the privilege of knowing. So why am I even preaching this sermon, maybe to just get it off my chest, or maybe to empower you to take your love to the streets, not just in your actions, as you always do, but in your words.

Stand up to the bullies, write to the editors and politicians, attend the council and school board meetings, whatever you need to do to get the word out that there is more than one voice in every room and it's time we listen to everybody with respect and dignity.

We are going through a very hard time in this nation and in our world. We should be finding solutions. The virus has taken so many and it has wreaked havoc in our lives.

So what are so many communities doing in response? Instead of dealing with our problems head on, they are making up nonsense laws about voting rights, attacks on women's rights, arguments over history class, all of that instead of trying to rebuild our lives, our communities and our hope in the future. The level that our discourse has plummeted is embarrassing but in the meantime...

The longest war in American History ended last week. I did not hear of a parade, I did not hear of a way to honor our service people coming home. Because we were too busy fighting with each other, we didn't honor those who came home after truly fighting for us with their very lives. History repeats itself unless we own our history.

But we can't be teachable, unless we listen first, we can't learn from one another if we already have our mind made up with our own rightness.

Theologian JI Packer wrote, “Not until we have become humble and teachable, standing in awe of God's holiness and sovereignty...acknowledging our own littleness, distrusting our own thoughts, and willing to have our minds turned upside down, can divine wisdom become ours.”

Jesus showed us in this passage that humility is the path to wisdom. Listening and being teachable is the path to spiritual growth. Let's do our best to listen and learn from others this week and to not be afraid to speak our truth, to stand up to those who aren't listening and invite them to change. AMEN

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