

2 Samuel 9
Mark 7:24-37

Communion, 14th Sunday after Pentecost
Midway Presbyterian Church
September 3, 2023

David's Table

Introduction to the Old Testament Lesson

Mephibosheth was only five years old when both his father, Jonathan, and his grandfather, Saul, died in the Battle of Gilboa. At their deaths, the boy's nurse took him and fled in panic (2 Sam. 4:4). But in her haste, she dropped him, and that caused him to be lame in both his feet. In our Old Testament Lesson today we hear about the kindness of King David to Mephibosheth. Listen to these words from 2 Samuel, chapter 9...

Introduction to the Gospel Lesson

Our Gospel Lesson from Mark 7 includes two stories. The first is set in the region of Tyre and is about a Gentile woman and her demon-possessed daughter. The second is set in the Gentile territory of the Decapolis and is about a deaf man with a speech impediment. The lesson leads us to explore its mission thrust. That mission is seen first of all to include foreigners. But it reminds us not to neglect people with special needs in our midst. In both stories, the wonderful power of God is seen in Jesus.

Sermon

I had seen the sign about vegetables for sale several Saturdays on Highway 29, pointing up a side street, about a mile from where we live. But I had never taken the time to go by and see what it was all about. I assumed that someone had a garden and was selling some of the produce. But since my okra was slow coming in this year, I did go by and found a large lot in front of a house. There were blueberries, corn, tomatoes, and yes okra. However, this was not just an individual's garden. The place was called "David's Table," taking its name from our Old

Testament Lesson in 2nd Samuel. At David's Table the love of Jesus is demonstrated to adults with disabilities and their families—a place where they can find community and fulfillment. They come and work in the garden. The money raised from the sale of the produce provides for special outings and events for these people. This program is especially important since following high school, few go on to college or are able to enter the workplace.

And on a flyer on one of the tables, I saw a picture of a girl, now a young woman, whom I had met at the Meyer Center in Greenville when she was four years old, and I had done Special Needs planning with her parents. She is still wheelchair-bound due to her cerebral palsy, but with a delightful smile nonetheless.

A while back I read about a popular minister who was scheduled to preach at a small country church, which would seat only about a hundred people. When the appointed hour arrived, every seat was filled, with an overflow crowd standing outside. Since the church had no public address system, one of the ushers went up to the minister just before he was about to begin his sermon, and said, "Speak up! Remember the people on the outside."

Remember the people on the outside. That's what our lesson from Mark is all about. Certainly, the Syrophonecian woman with her sick daughter was "on the outside." But in Mark 7 we hear that it is not a person's national origin, illness, or gender, that is important.

The first part of our story takes place in the region of Tyre. Although this was Gentile territory, many Jews lived there as well. A Gentile woman with a demon-possessed daughter seeks help from Jesus. Bowing at his feet, this woman pleads for Jesus to heal her daughter.

People are prone to stumble over Jesus' words in verse 27:

"Let the children first be fed, for it is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs."

A dog in Jesus' time was not the well-loved "best friend" that it is today. Rather, it was a symbol of dishonor. *Dog* was used in a very derogatory way; at times the word was used to express a Jewish contempt for Gentiles.

But according to William Barclay, here Jesus did not use the common word for dog. He used the word *diminutive* that described, not the wild dogs of the street, but the pet lapdogs of the house. We know in speech just the tone of voice can make all the difference. We might say to someone, "You sorry scoundrel," and it could actually be a friendly expression, depending on how we said it.

Children in the text correspond to Israel. They are to be fed first. Israel had first offer to the gospel, but *only* first. There were other sheep not of this fold. (Jn. 10: 16) The woman responded that she knew that Israel had first offer, but that she couldn't even get the scraps that they threw away. Here was a woman of courage and faith and persistence. And Jesus healed her daughter. God's love is not limited to Jews, or Christians, or any group. It leaps barriers and overcomes obstacles.

Our text today would speak to us when our outlook is: "Don't bother me with people in Africa who are lost and sick. We have enough problems right here." Or, "It's too bad about those people on the Hawaiian island of Maui and the ravaging wildfire. But we've got plenty of needs right here in Anderson County." Or, "When you come to think of it, I've got all I can manage just taking care of my family and myself."

One of the great strengths of our Presbyterian Church has been its mission work throughout the world, proclaiming the gospel in word and deed, building churches and hospitals and schools. Building homes for at-risk children. Building homes for older adults. Today's text

would encourage us to continue this historic emphasis of mission to people here, and throughout the world.

The second story in our lesson from Mark is about the healing of the deaf-mute of the Decapolis. In Mark we see “special needs” people frequently being brought to Jesus. The method of healing was a common practice of the time. But note what Mark says in verse 33(a):

And taking him aside from the multitude privately....

Jesus did not make this incident a public spectacle, but in tender consideration treated him privately, one on one, person to person, hands-on.

...and looking up to heaven, he sighed, and said to him, “*Ephphatha*,” [ef’ fuh thuh] that is, “Be opened.” And his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. (7:34, 35)

Jesus’ “looking up to heaven” showed that it was ultimately from God that healing would come. And when it was done, the people declared:

He has done all things well; he even makes the deaf hear and the dumb speak. (7:37b)

This last declaration about the deaf hearing and the dumb speaking is a reference to Isaiah 35,

Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,
and the ears of the deaf unstopped;
then shall the lame man leap like a hart,
and the tongue of the dumb sing for joy.
for waters shall break forth in the wilderness,
and streams in the desert. (vv. 5-6)

Thus does Mark give much more than a character reference for a good man, but an affirmation that in Jesus the prophesied reign of God has come. In these two stories we see the light of the gospel shining in dark places, and not being overcome.

According to Lamar Williamson, while the story of Jesus' ministry to the Syrophonecian woman's daughter promotes the validity of mission to foreigners, the second story promotes that mission to those near at hand, but often neglected. Jesus' ministry will not observe national, racial, gender, ethnic, class or wellness boundaries. There's a place at the table for everyone in the mission and ministry of Jesus Christ.

Yes, there are plenty of people right in our own area who need the expression of compassionate care in Jesus' name. There are lost people who need an invitation to come to church and hear God's saving word. There are sick people who need care. There are people addicted to drugs who need treatment. There are poor people who need a helping hand. There are disabled people who need assistance. To be sure, we can't do everything that needs to be done, but we can do something. And one way Midway shows a willingness to do something is through support of The Developmental Center for Exceptional Children.

The second feature common to both stories is that the individuals who are healed do not come to Jesus by themselves, but are aided by others. The young girl is freed of her affliction because her mother pleads on her behalf. The deaf man is brought to Jesus by friends who beg for his healing, just as in Mark 2 the paralytic was lowered from the roof to Jesus' feet by his friends. In all these stories it is not simply the faith of the disabled persons that brings about their healing, but the active faith of their companions. Their stories remind us to approach Christ on behalf of others and to prayerfully seek the well-being of those who need help and care.

At the closing of our worship today we will sing that lovely hymn of Frederick William Faber, "There's a Wideness in God's Mercy." It was written in England in 1854. The first stanza:

There's a wideness in God's mercy,
Like the wideness of the sea;
There's a kindness in God's justice,
Which is more than liberty.
There is no place where earth's sorrows
Are more felt than up in heaven;
There is no place where earth's failings
Have such kindly judgment given.

So the model for our dealings with others is God's gracious mercy, not our limited human tolerance.

There *is* a wideness in God's mercy. It includes every prodigal son or daughter, every Samaritan; women at wells, tax collectors, Pharisees, lepers, and people with withered limbs; saints and sinners, Jews and Gentiles, men, women and children. Our Old Testament lesson from 2 Samuel 9 tells the story of how a disabled man was cared for by a great king.

My friends, Mark would have us remember the people on the outside. He would have us provide for them "a place at the table." Be they someone who can't walk, someone who is of a different religion, someone who has a mental illness, or someone who can't hear or speak.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.