



Mark 7

Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost
September 5, 2021

Ascension Lutheran Church
Pastor Chris

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

In 2003, the ELCA Youth Gathering and 40,000 of my closest high school friends were preparing to converge on the city of Atlanta. Planning teams always arrive a week to ten days early to begin moving the pieces in place in preparation for the arrival of the participants. In those days, planning team members were issued paper checks and had to find a local bank to cash them for our per diem money for meals and other expenses. In speaking with one of the staff of the Convention and Visitor Bureau, she mentioned a friend at a bank two miles from the stadium, who knew of the event and said her bank would be happy to cash the checks from the National Church. I drove down to the bank – jumped out of my car – opened the doors to the bank lobby and everyone in the bank turned and stared at me and if I remember correctly – everyone stopped talking when they saw me. But maybe that is how it felt and not exactly what happened. At first, I wondered if there had been several bank robberies in the recent past. And then I realized that I was the only white person in the building as I let the doors close behind me and I moved to the teller line. At 29, it was the first time, I had ever found myself in such a situation. Now, almost 20 years later – I have come to appreciate that experience more and more for opening my eyes to the world that our brother Edwin, our sister Tyra, and even Pastor Tony have experienced for much of their lives.

Today we find Jesus in the region of Tyre – a region of Gentiles – those who were unclean, according to Jewish tradition, and outside the margins of those Jesus was sent to save. Which means Jesus and the disciples are way outside their comfort zone risking their standing in their community and synagogue to interact with the unclean. This is the same area where the feeding of the 5000 takes place. The sermon on the Mount. Jesus walks on water. All the stories we know that bring us hope – were technically not stories for the Gentiles or for us. Until the woman of Syrophenician origin shows up. Scripture says, “She begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. ²⁷ 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.” I am not sure we find many moments when Jesus is more in-line with our own humanity. The woman begs. Jesus dismisses – even argues with the woman. And this mother is not about to let her daughter be left out of the hope Jesus seems to be offering. “She answered him, “Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.” As if to say, “Aren’t there crumbs of grace for the dogs?” And Jesus, Savior of the world, changes his mind. He said to her, “For saying that, you may go—the demon has left your daughter.” Perhaps that last part is not as human as we would hope. Many in our world, seem to be less inclined to change our minds these days when listening to someone else – If we listen at all. But that is a sermon for another day.

And yet maybe not.

I wonder if the Syrophenician woman knew of the prophet Isaiah, and his words offered to a people hungry for a word of hope and promise in a time of a great suffering. “God will come and save you. Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy. For waters shall break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert; the burning sand shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water.” The woman had to have heard something about this Jesus. Prophet? Messiah? Healer? Whatever title Jesus was using did not matter to her. The only thing that mattered was the life of her daughter.

The same is true of the friends of the deaf man with the speech impediment. Little side note. When Mark writes his version of the events of the life of Jesus – everything that is important happens immediately! Are you ready? Here we go.

Jesus is immediately brought a deaf man who has a speech impediment. Jesus hides away with the man and touches his ears, puts spit on his tongue. Kinda gross for a miracle. And then the best thing happens.



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Jesus sighs. Is there anything more human than a sigh? You can communicate so much through a sigh. In our house when the children cannot communicate through an eye roll, they upgrade to a sigh. It can be quiet or much more pronounced depending on what they are trying to communicate. I always thought that my children received their education in the language of sighing from their mother – but it turns out they might have learned this communication style from Jesus.

Jesus sighs and says “be opened” or “ephphatha” in the original Aramaic. And the man: his ears, his mouth, his whole world is opened, and he is healed. With a breath God created the world, and with a sigh Jesus heals it. This sigh is no doubt the sigh of God, the wish for everyone to be whole, the exhaustion of being asked to heal over and over again. But it’s also the sigh of hope, the breath/inspiration/healing of the Holy Spirit. Jesus sighs. What a human sound. In the lives of our children, a sigh is almost never intended to communicate inspiration or healing. It is almost always a sign of intense frustration and is often accompanied by several steps of stomping up the stairs to their rooms.

When I’m in a good place my breathing can become prayerful. And when I struggle...from the book of Romans: ²⁶ Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. I am grateful that God offers the assistance of the Holy Spirit to speak on my behalf. At other times, my sighs speak the same frustration and sometimes complete exhaustion and weariness that I hear from my beloved children. These sighs echo the sounds of my complete and entire humanity, an expression of those feelings and thoughts I’m having trouble putting words around. It is good to know that I am not alone – that Jesus too – knows how to communicate with sighs too deep for words.

And when everything is done. When the little girl is healed. When the deaf man hears and speaks. Jesus tells everyone present not to let people know what he is doing, and in the typical fashion of the entire Gospel of Mark, the more Jesus tries to keep himself a secret, the more people tell others about him. I love that the people who walked along side Jesus and saw the miracles happen in real time are told to keep his power a secret and they don’t. And all of us who hear about the miracles and the power of Jesus Sunday after Sunday in our world today, spend a lot of time keeping their faith in Jesus and the name of their Savior a secret. How did that happen? Regardless, let me offer you an opportunity this day. When you leave this place, go live in and live out the hope and promise of Jesus. Then blind see, the deaf hear; the lame walk and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy. For waters shall break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert; the burning sand shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water.” People of God, our world is thirsty for the story you have heard this day. Go and quench the thirst of everyone you meet with the message of hope Jesus offers to all of this day. Thanks be to God! Amen.