

Sermon **Fifteenth Sunday After Pentecost** Sept. 5th, 2021

Have you ever been in a situation where you have been stopped in your tracks?

Then after being stopped in your tracks, you either backed away OR even took off running for your life.

I cannot remember the exact date because it was 30 years ago, but I do know that it occurred during the summer of 1991. I had just finished my freshman year of college at Kentucky Christian and had the opportunity to do an internship at Camp CYOKAMO in Alba, Missouri.

Dan and I were the interns and we stayed in the camp dorms during the weekend. On one of the Saturday's, I came out of the shower and into the main section of the dormitory and there **IT** was. The "it" was a Northern Cottonmouth snake which we had been warned about. It stopped me in my tracks and I backed away slowly until I was out of the door and ran scarily away. I was not a fan of snakes then and really not a fan of snakes today.

When I come across our Mark 7 text each lectionary cycle, it stops me in my track and I run away from it because the James text has very practical advice as he shares with the church community, the consequences of human speech. He then shares about the importance of doing something tangible and immediate.

However, I felt the need to stare deep into the eyes of the Mark and wrestle with his words. In the text that we read, we could take the easy approach and take a look at the two miracles that occur or we can tackle the harsh words that Jesus shares with the first woman that does not seem to be in character with Jesus.

Did Jesus really call her a dog and what in the world was he referring to and why did he do it? Many like to think of it as Jesus joking with her or that he was simply testing her, but that may be taking the easy way out.

So, today, I am going to try to journey with the text and maybe we can learn something from it outside of the two miracles that show the power of the divinity of Jesus.

In the beginning of our scripture, we Jesus taking a journey to Tyre which is a city up north in Sidon. The walk would be about 25 miles. Jesus did not make the journey to perform miracles. He went there to hit pause and to rest. His goal was to get to the house and have **no one** know that he was there. That did not last long.

His privacy was invaded by a woman, a Gentile at that, who wanted a healing to occur. She barged into the house and kneeled at his feet and here is the conversation.

The woman, "Jesus, will you cure my daughter?"

Jesus responded, "Stand in line and take your turn. The children get fed first. If there's any left over, **the dogs** get it."

We are a dog family. We love dogs. However, in the first century, dogs were seen as scavengers and not pampered pets who take up more than half of the bed. Thus, the dog comment

are the words that many believe to be rude, dismissive and patronizing. Why did he do it? Maybe, Jesus was exhausted from the long walk and disappointed that he was not getting the rest that he so desired. The previous days work and the walk had depleted him. But, the sharp words from Jesus strike us as truly unconscionable.

But, the woman is not deterred by Jesus statement. She replies with some wit and maybe even humor.

She said, "Of course, Master. But don't dogs under the table get scraps dropped by the children?"

She is determined that her voice will be heard.

Jesus was impressed. He responds by saying, “You’re right! On your way! Your daughter is no longer disturbed. The demonic affliction is gone.”

The woman left the house and went home. When she arrived at the house, she found her daughter relaxed on the bed, the torment gone for good.

This story is the beginning. This is where we see that God’s reign has dawned upon the Gentiles and that the Good News is indeed Good News for everyone; not just the Jews.

The woman here in our story was convinced that grace and mercy extended to her and she was there to claim it.

There are a few things that I hope that we can take away from this text.

One, even though it did not work out as Jesus planned, he took time to get away and tried to escape. Friends, we live in a very hectic world, make sure that you hit the pause button.

The conversation between Jesus and the woman could be equated to a prayer for us today. Many times, I think that we try to make sure that our prayers are neat and clean. The woman argued with Jesus. Maybe, at times, our prayers to God need to be argumentative and filled with lament.

When we live into the prayers lament, they are powerful avenues that pave the way to hope, healing and then praise. I am not sure about you, but when I look at our world today; we are in desperate need of hope and healing. Psalm 30 may be one of the best examples of this type of prayer. It starts out with the lament: “O Lord my God, I cried to you.” However, it ends with, “O Lord, my God, I will give thanks to you forever.”

I want to encourage you to be raw and honest with God. Make sure that they go hand in hand though. Connect yourself with honest lament but then rest in the renewed hope.

Then, I truly believe in this passage, we see Jesus humanity in full force. His encounter with the woman, expanded his horizons and enlarged his empathy. When we, as individuals and a church, take time to encounter the other; we will grow us well. Thus, make it a challenge to listen to some voices that you may not normally encounter.

This past week, I had the opportunity to have two conversations that I normally would not have. One was with a Latino woman in the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion meeting that I attended. She shared with us story after story of her bad experience in Door County because of the color of her skin. Then, the next conversation was with a school story who shared with me her worries about the students of the LGBT community because of the bullying that is directed at them and the school not creating safe spaces for them.

I could not have empathy for either of them if I was not willing to listen in to hard conversations.

Thus, I want to encourage you to respectfully engage with one another and engage with the other authentically. When we do this, we can enlarge our capacity for empathy and service.

We did not look at the second healing. In that healing, Jesus also reaches out to an individual that is outside of his familiar circle. He did that healing with intimacy and touch.

Thus, when we look at the stories of Mark 7, we can learn about the mission of the church. The church is called to extend its reach far beyond our boundaries of familiarity. May we have the courage to listen carefully to the voices on the margin. May we have the courage to be open to the other and in that openness, may we learn new insight that will catapult us to renewed joy and propel us to praise our God.

Amen.