

Pentecost 15-September 5, 2021

Baltic and East Nidaros Lutheran Parish

Mark 7:24-37

“Hearing About or From” Sermon by Pastor Randall J. Questad

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

*I would like to begin today with asking you a question and I would like you to respond simply by raising your hands. Here's the question. "How many of you have heard **about** Jesus?" As I suspected, we no longer have a shortage of Sunday School teachers. I didn't ask this question to trick you or to minimize the qualifications to teach Sunday School. However, the essence of teaching Sunday School or telling someone else about your faith is telling others **about** Jesus.*

*In both healing stories that you just heard from the gospel reading from Mark, the Syrophenician woman and the group of people that brought the man who was deaf and had a speech impediment came to Jesus only because they had heard **about** Jesus from someone else. In each case, after hearing about Jesus and finding him, Jesus was begged to heal the little girl and deaf-mute man.*

Begging Jesus to heal these people indicates that Jesus wasn't likely the first stop to find healing. It is not uncommon not to run to Jesus first for healing. Maybe someone knows about a home remedy that has worked for them and that is attempted first. Or sometimes you hear about a doctor who is skilled in healing the problem you are suffering from. This makes perfect sense. You don't ask your mechanic who you trust with fixing your car about the migraines you are having. You don't ask your plumber about your digestive problems or call Mitchell roofing and siding about the shingles that have attacked your skin. But once you have asked everyone that you think could help you for whatever healing you need, you might remember when someone told you about Jesus and what he did for them. This may even come from a memory of what a Sunday School teacher told you about Jesus 50 years ago. But in desperation, you go to Jesus not to ask for help, but to beg for help.

*These people go to Jesus for help not to hear more **about** Jesus, but to hear **from** him directly. All the stories about Jesus are necessary. Therefore, Sunday School teachers are so necessary. They tell story after story of what Jesus did for others or maybe for themselves, so when their students exhaust other resources for helping them, they will go to Jesus to demand a blessing*

*from Jesus and not just hear **about** what he has done for others. They don't want to hear about the blessings someone else has received like winning the Powerball lottery, they want to receive for themselves that they have heard others have been given.*

The story of the Syrophenician woman who came to Jesus to receive a blessing teaches us how to persist when it seems that Jesus told us the answer is "No". Jesus is often questioned if not criticized for his ungodlike response to this woman. It seems that maybe there is a boundary that Jesus' love won't cross. Jesus tells this woman that the food that he has to give is for his children and is not to be thrown to dogs such as herself. At this point, the woman could have done what she had when she had gone to other people for help. She could have gone home and continued to care for her daughter as she did in the past and seeing that nothing changed. She could have doubted what others had told her about Jesus and just checked him off her list as another failed attempt to heal her daughter. She could have turned in despair and walked away. But she didn't. She took the curse that Jesus had given to her and looked Jesus square in the eye and demanded that she have what she had heard others had been given. She didn't apologize for not coming to Jesus in the first place or argue with Jesus for essentially calling her a dog. She would not be satisfied by hearing about Jesus now that she was face to face with him. She would only be satisfied by hearing from Jesus and receiving the blessing that she demanded. It was when Jesus heard the persistence and begging from this woman, that Jesus delivered exactly what she demanded. And Jesus in this case, didn't reply "ok go get your daughter and I will touch and heal her". Instead, Jesus had heard the woman's faith and spoke and told the woman that when she went home, she would find her child on the bed and the demon would be gone.

Jesus moves from the region of Tyre to the region of the Decapolis. The Decapolis region was like the area of the Quad cities of the Midwest, except this was a region of 10 cities and not 4. An unlikely Sunday School teacher had been telling about Jesus in the Decapolis. The first healing that Mark records was a person possessed by many demons and when Jesus exorcised these demons, he sent them into the herd of pigs. Then this grateful man free of demons wants to follow Jesus, but Jesus will not let him and instead tells him to become a Sunday School teacher in the region around Galilee. It isn't specifically recorded in our reading today, but it is very likely that this once demon possessed man was the first person to tell others about Jesus in the region of the Decapolis.

We are told that it wasn't just one person who brought this deaf man who also had a speech impediment to Jesus, it was a group of people. They all might have become tired of caring for

this grown person who was unable to do many things for himself. They might have had a selfish motive for making this person more useful to society. We again also read that Jesus likely wasn't their first stop in receiving healing. They didn't ask Jesus to see what he might do. They begged him to heal him. Without specifically mentioning the man who was possessed by many demons who they heard Jesus had healed, they could easily believe that if Jesus could heal that man, he could easily restore hearing and speech to this man.

It is at this point; we would not want Jesus to chair our Sunday School teacher recruiting efforts. Instead of Jesus performing this miracle in front of a crowd of witnesses so many people could see what Jesus could do, he takes the man away from the crowd and does a private healing so only a few people are witnesses. Jesus puts his fingers in this man's ears and spits and touches his tongue. But before the healing is completed, we are told Jesus prays to his heavenly father. Jesus looks up. Jesus sighs. Jesus uses his native language by saying "Ephphatha" which means "Be opened." And immediately the man's hearing and speech is restored. Again, you would think Jesus would want as many people to know about him and what he can do as possible, but instead he tells the witnesses of the healing to tell no one. This is not what we want our Sunday School teachers to do!

Jesus wasn't using reverse psychology by telling these people not to tell anyone, even though it had the same effect as when you attempt to get a child to eat the green beans on their plate by telling them "I bet you can't eat those green beans". Jesus did not everyone want to know about him as a healer who could only fix hearing, sight, speech, and mobility problems. Jesus without question came to do these things and continues to grant healings today. If this is the first thing we tell others about Jesus, it should not be the last.

This past Wednesday night, I was invited to speak at Hilltop Methodist church for their Wednesday evening service. I used this same text as I spoke to this congregation. It was a more casual setting, so after reading the gospel, I also asked this group if they had heard about Jesus. Then I asked them for specific stories that they had heard about Jesus. The first person to respond said that the story most important to him was hearing that Jesus is his Savior.

This is the most important story for others to hear about Jesus. But this is only the beginning. This story is complete only when you encounter Jesus firsthand and hear this blessing is not just for other people. You have arrived at the right place today. You have won the Jesus lottery. He has forgiven your every sin. This he gives to you. Amen

