

Hayward United Methodist Church

Pastor Samuel's Message for the Fifteenth Sunday After Pentecost, September 5, 2021

"Jesus Has Done Everything Well"

Text: Mark 7:24-37

Gospel Reading: Mark 7:24-30 (NRSV)

And from there Jesus arose and went away to the region of Tyre and Sidon. And he entered a house, and would not have any one know it; yet he could not be hid. But immediately a woman, whose little daughter was possessed by an unclean spirit, heard of him, and came and fell down at his feet. Now the woman was a Greek, a Syrophenician by birth. And she begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. And he said to her, "Let the children first be fed, for it is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." But she answered him, "Yes, Lord; yet even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." And he said to her, "For this saying you may go your way; the demon has left your daughter." And she went home, and found the child lying in bed, and the demon gone.

Prayer for Illumination (UMH 6)

Lord, open our hearts and minds by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, that, as the Scriptures are read and your word proclaimed, we may hear with joy what you say to us today. Amen.

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Jesus's mission has been confined to the Jewish territory. Jesus primarily ministered in Galilee and he came to Jerusalem toward the end of his ministry. The gospel writers primarily focused on his ministry in Galilee where Jesus taught, preached, and healed. Mark records Jesus's ministry in the Gentile territory. There are two healing stories that take place in the Gentile territory. Both stories have their parallels in Matthew 15:1-20. In Matthew's Gospel, even Jesus's disciples were not in favor of healing anyone in the non-Jewish territory. The disciples had to learn also to expand their mission to the Gentiles. Peter was not willing to go to the Gentiles first. He primarily went to the Jews. He was told in a dream to go to the Gentiles.

Jesus does not want any publicity for his ministry, especially healing the people. He does not want them to misunderstand who he is. On many occasions he told the people healed not to tell anyone. On the contrary, they told everyone. Jesus was not simply a miracle worker. He is the Son of God. He came to die on the cross for ransom for many. Jesus wanted everyone to follow him as the suffering servant of God. He promised eternal life for all those who believed in him. Jesus promised to take us beyond this life to be with God forever. To follow Jesus is to follow him all the way to eternity.

First, Jesus meets a woman who is a Greek. Jesus came to the Gentile region of Tyre and Sidon to be away from the crowd. A large crowd was following him all the time. He did not have enough rest. So he and his disciples travelled to the Gentile region. He entered a house. Probably there was someone who welcomed him and the disciples. But the news spread. There was someone waiting for Jesus to come. There was a woman whose little daughter was possessed of a spirit. It does not say how long this little child was suffering. Probably it was for a while.

Someone brought the message to her that Jesus was here. She was hoping to meet Jesus for a while. Now her hope became reality. She believed that this was the time to come and meet Jesus and make her petition known to him. She came and fell at Jesus's feet. She realized that Jesus had the power to heal her daughter. Probably she tried other means to heal her daughter. But it did not work. She came to a point that Jesus was the only hope. She came in persistent faith and hope. She threw herself at the feet of Jesus. That shows that she realized that Jesus was divine. She was not just meeting an ordinary Jewish Rabbi from Galilee. She encountered a miracle-worker and the Son of God.

She had only one draw back. She was not a Jew, but a Gentile. So far Jesus healed mostly the people from Galilee. It was the first time Jesus encountered a non-Jew. Nevertheless, the woman begged Jesus to heal her daughter. She could have healed her daughter right away without speaking a word to her. But Jesus delayed. Jesus wanted to test her faith. Because Jesus was a Jewish Messiah. He followed the Jewish customs. He worshipped one God. But the woman was not familiar with the Jewish customs. She did not worship one God. She worshipped many gods. Probably she might misunderstand Jesus as a mere miracle-worker.

In Matthew's account, the disciples asked Jesus to send her away. Jesus would heal anyone without any reference to ethnic origin. He had to find out the intention of her coming to Jesus. Jesus had to test her persistence in faith. Jesus wanted to know if she would go away if he refused to heal her daughter. Jesus entered into a dialogue with her. Jesus would heal anyone. But he wants to know our intention in coming to him. He wants to know if we remain faithful to him.

Second, Jesus enters into dialogue. 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" (Mk 7:27). Jesus is not hard on her. Jesus is simply quoting a parable. He is making some kind of allusion to his ministry as well. In Matthew's account, Jesus is saying that he came to rescue the lost sheep of Israel. He does not say that he would not accept the Gentiles. He first wants to know if the Jews believed him as the Messiah. But the woman did not know all the references Jesus was making. She only hangs on Jesus's words.

She replied back to Jesus, saying, "Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs" (Mk 7:28). She is saying that there is plenty on the table. Food is overflowing. Definitely the food will fall from the table especially when children eat. As a mother of a little daughter she knew it. Probably she had puppies at home. They used to sit by the children and eat whatever falls from their mouth. This is a common occurrence. Jesus knew it well.

Jesus knew that she was very much persistent. She exhibited true faith in Jesus. Jesus knew that she would not leave her until Jesus healed her daughter. Jesus said, "For saying that, you may go – the demon has left your daughter" (Mk 7:29). This is a healing from a distance. Jesus did not come to their home and heal her daughter. She only said a word. His word carried the power to heal her daughter. Mark adds, "So she went home, found the child lying on the bed, and the demon gone" (Mk 7:30). First, the mother had faith in Jesus. She persisted in her plea. Second, she had faith that Jesus already healed her daughter by a word. By faith she went home and found her daughter healed.

There is another healing that takes place in the Gentile region. It takes place by the way of Sidon. Here Jesus heals a deaf man who had an impediment in the speech (Mk 7:32). But the man was brought by others. Probably those brought him to Jesus had faith in the healing power of Jesus. Jesus touched him and

healed him. Both stories involve faith and persistence. Mark here attests Jesus's healing in the Gentile region, saying, "Jesus has done everything well; he makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak" (Mk 7:37). Jesus demonstrated God's love for the Gentiles through these two healing stories. This is an allusion to God's coming presence to God's people as said by the prophet Isaiah: "And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads, they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away" (Isa 35:10).

Mark and Matthew recorded these special stories of healing that took place in the Gentile region. It seems to foreshadow of what is to come after Jesus's resurrection. Even at his death a Gentile centurion testified that Jesus is God's Son. God through Jesus comes to give joy and gladness. God through Jesus turns sorrow into celebration. The mother experienced joy. The daughter experienced healing.

The healing stories provide hope. They invite us to remain persistent in faith. Jesus did not heal the daughter right away. He wanted to test the mother if she would stay with Jesus when healing was not talking place as expected. Jesus will know our intention in coming to him. He wants to remain with him when prayers are not answered on time. But Jesus wants us to keep praying. He will reward our faithfulness.

What are you praying for? What is your petition to God? How long are you praying for? Are you at the point of giving up hope? Are you persevering in faith? Jesus is listening to your prayers. He will answer your prayers in due time. He would only say a word that would be sufficient to bring joy and goodness.

God Bless.

Pastor Samuel

Let's say the Benediction together:
The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ,
and the love of God,
and the communion of the Holy Spirit
be with us all. Amen.