

Isaiah 35:4-7a

Mark 7:24-37

James 2:1-17

“I will sing praises to the Lord as long as I live.” AMEN!

To be honest, I don't prefer
the gospel reading today.

I don't like the way, nor the words,
Jesus spoke to the woman.

Even though she was a Gentile of
Syrophoenician origin,
she was a human being.

I don't like to try to make explanations
for Jesus' words because we,
in following an “all-loving and inclusive God,”
shouldn't need to do that.

Some of the defenses out there
are that he was testing her moxie.

Another is that his word “dog” was
meant to be puppy.

Truly, any attempt to soften his words
are not at all helpful.

Jesus simply should have known better.

All the more condemning is the fact that
this account comes right on
the heels of last week's lesson where

Jesus taught the temple authorities
(and the crowd listening) that
"nothing outside a person that by going in
can defile,

but the things that come out are what defile."

Meaning: words hurt and defile when
they are hateful or inappropriate.

That truth from Jesus gave us a hard example of
the way harsh words coming out of
a person's mouth defile them.

Jesus makes himself quite the negative example.

So, even though I don't like (or prefer)
the gospel lesson today, this needs
to be addressed,
but perhaps not dwelled on.

It must not be ignored, but instead
make us wonder what kind of Jesus
Mark portray's here?

There is, here, a tale of two Jesus'.

One is teaching about the way
words can hurt and defile;

the other about what can happen when
hurtful words are spoken.

I wonder if it is possible to think that
we know better today
than Jesus knew yesterday. (Mmm.)

I believe that we can let that statement
hang in the air for a while.

We don't really need to defend nor elaborate,
because there's really no way to know.

We will let it go and focus attention on
the tale of two healings.

We don't skip over the disturbing words,
but hold his words in contrast to what
Jesus will eventually do. (Pause)

We know, for sure, that a worried mother
came to Jesus, bowed before him, and
begged him to heal her daughter.

We know, for sure, that women in that culture
were often dehumanized and abused.

We know, for sure, that the same things
happen today,
especially to Black women.

Even by people who call themselves Christian.

When people try to justify Jesus' language
then it makes room for certain people to hold
and proclaim misogynistic views and
in some cases act on xenophobic
and racist ideology. (Pause)

What we celebrate today, is first,
that the woman talked back.

It was her faith-filled response to Jesus'
inappropriate words that
moved Jesus to heal.

He affirmed this statement with his own
words in response to her reply,

“For saying that you may go-the demon
has left your daughter.”

This healing occurred because she dared

to speak out on behalf of her people and
she knew Jesus had the power to change
her daughter's situation.

It doesn't really matter if he'd have done it
without her speaking up, or not.

We recognize that with her words,
with her desperation, and with her courage,
Jesus ministry of inclusivity is
now made visible.

That's what really matters.

Feminist theologian, Elaine Wainwright wrote,
"The woman's great faith makes possible a life
free of oppressive restrictions for herself
and her daughter.

The subversive power of this story goes
far beyond the traditional
boundary breaking [motifs]."

Since she will not be denied the crumbs
that fall from God, neither will those
who are oppressed and marginalized today
be denied justice.

Think one person can't make a difference?

This account should make us see
that one person can make quite a
positive difference. (Pause)

It was as though Jesus' ears were opened by her.

And this leads us to the tale of
his second healing in the lesson today.

It's one I often overlook, but today
it underscores the change that occurred in Jesus
following the encounter.

Rather than overhearing a conversation
with the deaf man,
we witness a series of actions.

Jesus was still in foreign territory,
he's no longer hiding from the crowds.

His ears opened when a man was brought
to him.

The ones that brought him, begged Jesus
to lay hands on him to heal him of his
deafness and speech impediment.

A series of action follows.

Jesus removed him from the crowd,
put his fingers in the man's ears, spat,
and touched the man's tongue.

He looked up to heaven and said, "Be opened."

Immediately healing the man who is
now able to speak clearly and hear well.

The final action in the account is a command:
Tell no one!

But the more he ordered them,
the more zealously they proclaimed it. (Pause)

A couple things are telling about this command
that I'd never thought of.

Jesus commanded demons and they obeyed.

We notice that human beings have
the ability to disobey Jesus' commands and
that should tell us something about
God's incredible love for us and our

God-given, God-approved, task of being
able to talk back.

To declare, through the work of the Spirit,
that even the dogs (like me) can eat the crumbs.

Even the deaf, and those with speech impediments,
should be able to hear and speak clearly.

And when we see the miracles,
when we know what this Jesus can do, does do...
we cannot be silent about it... must not.

For if Jesus' ears can be opened,
then our tongues can be loosed
to tell people of the glory of God.

AMEN!