

Lenten Devotional March 11, 2024

Scripture

Mark 7:24-37

24 From there he set out and went away to the region of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know he was there. Yet he could not escape notice, 25 but a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately heard about him, and she came and bowed down at his feet. 26 Now the woman was a Gentile, of Syrophenician origin. 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." 28 But she answered him, "Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." 29 Then he said to her, "For saying that, you may go - the demon has left your daughter." 30 So she went home, found the child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.

31 Then he returned from the region of Tyre, and went by way of Sidon towards the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis. 32 They brought to him a deaf man who had an impediment in his speech; and they begged him to lay his hand on him. 33 He took him aside in private, away from the crowd, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spat and touched his tongue. 34 Then looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, "Ephphatha," that is, "Be opened." 35 And immediately his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. 36 Then Jesus ordered them to tell no one; but the more he ordered them, the more zealously they proclaimed it. 37 They were astounded beyond measure, saying, "He has done everything well; he even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak."

Devotion

The Rev. Ronnie Cox '23

Different genders, different cultures, different nations, different races. So much separated this woman from Jesus. They could hardly have been more polarized, and their people could not have hated the other more. Yet she comes to Jesus. She comes to Jesus because she is desperate in only the way a parent can be to save the little child they love. And the interaction between the two of them is brief and yet very profound. Christ's response to her begging seems harsh and unkind; to call her a dog was even worse in that time than it is today if he had called her *κυσίν*, which he used in Matthew 7:6 but instead, he names her among the *κυνάρια*. The Greek differentiates between a pet and a wild scavenging dog or even a farm dog.

Yet Christ does place her beneath the Jewish people—a people who were weaker and often persecuted by the more powerful Tyre. For many in our world, this humbling comment would have pushed us from Christ. Our blood boils when life forces us to be brought low and challenges us to admit we are not always on top. Humility is a large part of the practice of Lent, not only as a time for remembrance and self-sacrifice but also as a time for humility.

Now, we have a choice to respond with self-righteous indignation or to respond in the same fashion as the Canaanites. In the only words she speaks, she acknowledges her place as an outsider who is adopted, not as one born into the house. She accepts the place of humility, and she expresses her faith that even the tiniest word from Jesus could work miracles.

Her humility and her faith brought down all the walls that divided them. In the Syrophenician Woman, we see a model of healthy humility. Just as Jesus responded to her faith, he is ready to respond to ours with love, compassion, and transformation.

Prayer

This Lent, Lord, remind me that I am beloved by God even though I am not worthy. Even though I am not enough. I am loved, and by the power of your Spirit, I am being transformed into a child of God, perfected in love, molded by grace into the image of your son Jesus our Savior. Amen.