

Lent Devotional March 16, 2026

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 Syrophoenician 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 And when she went home, she 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 toward 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 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. Mark Gaskill '03

Jesus never loses an argument with a lawyer, a priest, or even the Devil. But he does lose this argument with a Gentile woman. The surprising thing is that, in light of his other teachings, Jesus *deserves* to lose this argument. Even if you set aside the racial strife between Jew and Gentile, he is ignoring the plea of a desperate mother for the well-being of her child. This deflection is rooted in the kind of legalism that he often forcefully criticizes in the Scribes and Pharisees; in other instances, Jesus would probably refer to a person who was denying compassion and care due to some legal complication as a "whitewashed tomb."

Jesus had left Galilee to wrestle with a puzzle about his own mission. So, he takes a trip to Tyre; what better place to get your head together than at the beach? There are plenty of miracle stories and moments where Jesus demonstrates his divine insight and compassion, but here he meets a woman who is the living answer to the puzzle he is seeking to solve.

Encounters with humanity outside of one's tribe run contrary to so many things Jesus' culture taught him. But instead of holding onto a form of faith imprisoned by the bonds of antipathy between peoples, Jesus does something that truly points to his holiness: he changes his mind. He changes his mind to heal this child, he heals a man from the Decapolis, and he sees that these Gentile "dogs" are such fertile ground for the Good News that he can't even order them to keep it to themselves.

Prayer

God of all creation, heal us of the demons that try to divide us. Cast out the lying spirits that justify turning our backs on the suffering. Open our ears to hear what is wrong, loose our tongues to speak

with truth, unbind our hearts from narrow, pinching selfishness. Change our hearts and minds to show your compassion to the world.