

September 9, 2018

Prayer

May the words of my mouth be meditations of our hearts and be always acceptable unto Thee. O Lord our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

Sermon

The gospel according to Mark has many stories of Jesus' acts and almost always Mark tells the reader that Jesus tried to get the people not to talk about what was going on. It's become known as the Messianic secret. That Jesus wanted to teach about the kingdom of God and he wanted the people to respond to that gospel. To that message. But as far as the miracles and the healings, he wanted those not to be in the way. Not to be in the way of what he was trying to teach. He did not want to be seen simply as a healer or a worker of miracles.

And yet we hear over and over again, that whenever he comes into a place that seems to be what the people have heard about the most. That Jesus has healed someone. That he has cast out demons. And so, the people who were in need, or had friends or family who were sick, or possessed or were deaf or could not speak. Those were the ones that they would bring to Jesus so that he could heal them.

And normally Jesus like the deaf man in the story today, he heals him. He tells them not to talk about it. That never seems to work out very well. But in the first story, we have Jesus in a house. According to Mark, he didn't want anybody to know that he was there. Word got out and a Gentile woman hears about him. Her daughter is possessed by a spirit. An evil spirit, a demon. And she wants her daughter healed. She wants the demon cast out. And she is brave enough to come as a woman.

Coming to a Rabbi, and asking him/begging him for healing for her daughter.

And we hear Jesus's first response and it sounds pretty harsh. It's not right. He says, "Let the children be fed first, and then it could be spread." I think this is Jesus saying I understand my role as being the Messiah and I'm thinking in terms of the humanity of Jesus. My role is to spread the gospel. My role is to come and tell people about what God is doing. And I have come to those who are the people of the covenant. Who have an understanding of who God is and what God has done in the past.

Because they are the ones who should know and understand this word, what God is doing now. Even though from our standpoint and the reading of the gospel we know and understand that it was the leadership was the most reluctant to believe that Jesus was the Messiah. And so, Jesus in his judgement of this woman who is a Gentile. It's not your time yet, it will come, but it's not your time yet. And the woman's response, "Well even the dogs eat the crumbs that the children drop."

And that must have struck a resident tone in Jesus. Here he is spreading the gospel and the very ones who should be hearing it and receiving it are some of the ones who are rejecting it. The crumbs, the food that he is spreading to the people is being dropped if you will. And his response then is, "Because you've said this." Because she has some understanding of what is going on and the power that stands before her. "Then go home, your daughter is well." And she goes home to find it just as he said.

His early judgement of her as he was not sent to. It was not yet her time as a Gentile to receive the gospel. Because of her faith, because of her understanding that was deeper than he could see when she first

arrives. This humanity of Jesus. Then understands that by that faith, she was ready to prepare to receive the gospel message. And to receive him beyond being a healer and being a Messiah. It's really a powerful story of seeing the humanity of Jesus making a judgement. And then if you will the divinity within Jesus, opening his eyes to the faith of that individual.

I thought that just went beautifully with the Epistle reading this morning, where James is riding to the churches about how they are treating the people that are coming and how they are making judgements based on human terms. You see someone come in with fine clothing you bow down. You have them sit at a seat of honor. And someone in dirty clothes, someone who is obviously poor or seems so. You treat them without the same respect. You're having them stand over there. Or you can sit on the floor here while the rest of us are reclining. It wasn't the right judgement.

James is trying to get the people to see and understand that. That the gospel of Jesus Christ has come to all people. And quite frankly it is the poor who have been the first to receive and understand it and accept it. Because it means so much to them. They don't have the same resources that the rich have. Where they feel like they can live a life apart from God, where they're not dependent upon God. And the poor know and understand that what God has given in Jesus Christ is a treasure so rich that they want it for themselves. They want this good news of being accepted by God. Not being judged by the amount of money they have or the resources that they bring to bear, or authority over others that they might have.

And so, they come to the church. They come to this place of welcome and inclusion where they hear that message of God's love for them. And they have what they have missed from society. And that is

acceptance and respect. And James writes that short little passage. Mercy triumphs over judgement. Mercy triumphs over judgement. I think that's exactly what we see in Jesus as he is dealing with that woman. His initial judgement is it's not that time. The mercy that he shows after he hears her response is what truly is the heart of the gospel. That God has mercy and it triumphs over the judgement that is rightly ours.

James has already written that if you're basing your life and living on the law. Then it doesn't matter that you just don't live up to one part of it. If you don't live up to one part of it, you don't live up to it period. He's trying to remind them and draw them into the idea and understanding that none of them have reached that point of being acceptable and righteous before God. It is only by God's mercy that triumphs over judgement that they are able to come within that relationship with God. And to live their lives in a new way. And they are called to see on another in that new way. Not based on those judgements but based on mercy.

I remember well when I was in high school/college. It was a time when things were beginning to change in the church. The teenagers and the college students and such would come to church in blue jeans, t-shirts, sandals or tennis shoes and the proper people, the older folks, would be aghast. Don't you know that when you come to church you're supposed to dress up.

They were making judgements about who these people were without ever getting to know who they were. But making judgements about how they were dressed. And of course, that just encouraged us to dress that much more poorly. To make a statement. You know, do you think Jesus really cares what we're wearing? Isn't it more important that we come to church? That we hear the scripture, that we worship God

together. And yet you're making judgements. I really didn't dress that way much because I was living at home and my parents simply would not have taken me if I had dressed that way. Go change clothes. But I understood the point. You know, why are we making judgements based on how people are dressed? The gospel message is for us all. And it's to go beyond those judgements of the world and to see the person. To accept the person.

I'll never forget a story that my father told me. He was a young man and he had gone to a car dealership. He was going to buy a car. He was shopping around because that was what my dad did. And he said he saw this older gentleman. He had his bib overalls on. He looked like he had just gotten off the tractor and come into town and he was looking at new cars. And the salesmen weren't in any hurry to go and talk to this guy. In his dirty overalls, he was looking at these cars that they were absolutely sure that he couldn't afford.

And finally, somebody comes over and starts talking to him. The man had been looking at him look at the car and he's checking the tires and doing all the things that you do. And the salesman tried to get him to look at a cheaper model. Different car. He said, "No, no I think this is what I want." He said, "Well sir this car, it's pretty expensive." Said, "I can read. I can see what it costs." And he said well we might be able to get you financing for it. And the man said, "No I think I want this car. And he reached in his pocket and he pulled out enough cash to pay for the car.

They had judged him as being this poor farmer that probably didn't have ten cents to his name and yet he was able to pay for what he wanted. They made a terrible judgement and they may have missed out on a sale. The guy really wanted the car, or he would have gone some place else.

Now contrast that with Bernie Madoff. Everybody remember who that is. The guy that was rich. He was well-educated. He was confident. And he sold to his friends, other millionaires, this dream of increasing their pension, their money. You know, you give me a million dollars and I'll make it ten million dollars for you. Well that was almost true. You give me a million dollars and then I'll get nine more and then I'll have ten million dollars.

Everybody judged him by how he lived and what he wore. And coming to the great parties or giving the great parties. And having so much money. Okay this is a guy who's successfully knows what he's doing. And so, they put into his hands millions and millions of dollars. Their live savings. Only to find out that it was all a scheme. And their judgement of him was wrong. Because they never got to know who he was, they only saw the persona that he projected that he wanted them to see as he took their money. These are stories of judgements that are made without getting to know the person.

We are called as the church not to make those judgements. But to be merciful even if we think someone may not be worthy from the way they look or the way they speak. Or where they have come from. We are to show mercy. To share with them the gospel. To share with them fellowship. To share with them this community, to support, to uphold. And to receive from them the gifts that they have to offer. That's what we are as the church. No one greater than the other because they have more resources. Or no worse because they have fewer.

We are together as a church family. We are together as a community that comes together to worship together. That gives to support the ministries of the church. To reach out beyond our walls and to help those who are in need and to be there as strength and comfort for one another.

James was very clear in the writing of his letter. We are called not to make judgements simply according to the law, but to accept and receive the mercy of God. To share that with one another. Based not on how they look or what resources they bring to bear but because they are beloved children of God. And the only way to know and understand that is to come to know and understand one another. In that way, we can love and care for one another, support one another. And mercy truly triumphs over judgement.