



Sept. 9, 2018 Mark 7: 24-37 & Is. 35: 4-7a

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Rolheiser, Fr. Ron. [Binding and Loosing](#)

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ENTERING THE SCENE:

If you have ever had a compelling need for help with a disease or impediment you can begin to appreciate the woman and man in this text. They obviously were on the lookout for Jesus, and even though he wanted to hide he couldn't. People tracked him down wherever he went. Once again Jesus commands them not to tell anyone but they do. The woman would not take no for an answer and the friends of the man begged on his behalf. When you reflect on this text, take time to remember when you were that woman or those friends. See what new insights this exercise brings.

Mk. 7:24-37

24 Jesus left that place and went to the vicinity of **Tyre**. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know it; yet he could not keep his presence **secret**. 25 In fact, as soon as she heard about him, a **woman** whose little **daughter** was possessed by an **evil spirit** came and fell at his feet. 26 The **woman** was a **Greek**, born in **Syrian Phoenicia**. She **begged** Jesus to drive the **demon** out of her **daughter**. 27 First let the **children** eat all they want," he told her, "for it is not right to take the **children's** bread and toss it to their **dogs**." 28 Yes, **Lord**," she replied,

"but even the **dogs** under the table eat the **children's crumbs**." 29 Then he told her, "For such a reply, you may go; the **demon** has left your **daughter**." 30 She went home and found her **child** lying on the bed, and the **demon** gone.

(Catholic lectionary reading starts here)

31 Then Jesus left the vicinity of **Tyre** and went through **Sidon**, down to the Sea of Galilee and into the region of the **Decapolis**. 32 There some people brought to him a man who was **deaf** and could hardly **talk**, and they **begged** him to place his hand on the man. 33 After he took him **aside**, away from the crowd, Jesus put his **fingers** into the man's **ears**. Then he **spit** and **touched** the man's **tongue**. 34 He looked up to heaven and with a **deep sigh** said to him, "**Ephphatha!**" (Which means, "**Be opened!**"). 35 At this, the man's **ears** were **opened**, his **tongue** was **loosened** and he began to **speak** plainly. 36 Jesus **commanded** them not to tell anyone. But the more he did so, the more they kept **talking** about it. 37 People were **overwhelmed** with **amazement**. "He has done everything well," they said. "He even makes the **deaf** hear and the **mute** speak."

DISCUSSION QUESTION: Jesus never uses a person's disability or handicap to his own advantage. He protects the person's dignity and freedom by taking them aside to assure them that they are of utmost importance, not just a chance to prove his powers to the people. What does this tell you about Jesus' God?

PRAYER: Healer Jesus, your attempt to get some down time was frustrated by the ever pressing needs of people. Sometimes I too feel like just getting away and then something or someone frustrates my plans. Help me to respond with tenderness and grace so that I too can be a channel of God's love for others. Amen.

WORD STUDY AND QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

TYPE /SIDON: (See information below) In order to get away from those who refused to hear and see, Jesus had to go where he hoped that no one would recognize him. But even leaving the territory did not remove him from notice. Now even the "pagans" were on to him and his apparent power from God.

Have you ever experienced recognition by those who were 'strangers', when those around you were 'blind and deaf' to what you were about? What caused this impediment of recognition? What makes it possible for the stranger to see and hear when those close to you cannot?

SECRET: Mark's gospel has a sense of mystery (secret) about it. We get hints of who Jesus is, and then all of a sudden, we realize that things are not what they seem. It is as if he wants us to struggle along with those first century people with the question: "Who do people say that I am".

How is God working by having Jesus off into Gentile territory? Is there a way that Jesus us let in on God's deeper 'secret' when he encounters this Phoenician woman?

WOMAN / GIRL: Women and girls were the most vulnerable of people in the times of Jesus. Often seen as being of little worth, yet this woman with her sick daughter refuses to be ignored. This challenges Jesus to a more inclusive understanding of God's plan.
What can be learned from the response of this 'gutsy' woman, who loves enough to take on any challenge on behalf of her beloved child?

DAUGHTER / CHILDREN /CHILD: Jesus has a special love for children. In and through this love he reveals that God has a special love for all God's children as well.

Is there any more precious reality than to be the loved child of God? Is there anything impeding your ability to experience this love? Is there anyone in your life, who will be 'gutsy' enough to dare whatever it takes to remove this impediment?

GREEK /SYRIAN PHOENICIA: Phoenicia, an organization of Greek city-states, was a wealthy and cosmopolitan area of coastal trading harbors. The religion was Canaanite and the politics was: do whatever it takes to maintain good trade relations with the powers that be at the time.

Can knowing this, help to make sense of the woman's clever response to Jesus' challenge? Has this woman's love for her daughter opened her to risk rejection by this Jewish man? How has love called you to such a risk?

BEGGED: The woman begs for her daughter, and the friends of the deaf-mute beg for his healing. When we beg, we acknowledge our neediness and inability to do for ourselves.

How are these people different from the ones Jesus is fleeing from in the beginning of this passage? What makes them different?

DOGS: In the original language the word implies the beloved puppy dog of a home. The woman transforms a possible insult into a call to love and compassion.

How do you feel about Jesus' response to this woman?

LORD: This woman's culture had many gods, and accommodated itself to new ones, as the need required.

What is she implying when she calls Jesus, Lord?

CRUMBS: Jesus has just fed the five thousand and shortly will feed another four thousand. Each time there was enough for all to eat their fill, and have leftovers besides. This woman will happily settle for crumbs.

What does this tell you about the woman? How do you think Jesus felt when she said she would settle for crumbs?

DECAPOLIS: Rome had conquered and now ruled the 10 cities known as the Decapolis. Jesus goes there to find solitude and safety, much as Mary and Joseph escaped to Egypt in his childhood.

What is it about a foreign place that offers respite? Have you ever "gotten out of town" in order to get a break?

DEAF / EARS: Early in Jesus' ministry he quotes Isaiah 35:5-6, (Lk. 4:18-19). Those who thought they knew all about God seemed deaf to hearing anything new or more about God. Their ears were 'stopped up' by their inability to reach beyond their self-imposed limits.

Is there anything 'stopping up', or limiting your ability to hear more and new things from God?

TALK / TONGUE / MUTE: When someone is deaf, it is also likely that they cannot speak as well. They cannot form the words, and use their tongues for speech, because one limit creates another.

Do you ever find yourself unable to speak to an issue because of your limited knowledge of God? Can studying scripture help to open your ears and loosen your tongue?

ASIDE: Jesus never uses a person's disability or handicap to his own advantage. He protects the person's dignity and freedom by taking them aside to assure them that they are of utmost importance, not just a chance to prove his powers to the people.

What does this tell you about Jesus' God?

FINGERS / TOUCHED: Touch is such an important part of human life. Healers know that an energy transfer happens in touching another person. It also carries the message that the person touched is cared for and accepted by the one doing the touching.

Have you ever needed a healing touch? What makes touch such a powerful way to communicate?

SPIT: Saliva was thought to contain the essence of a person. Some primal people begin their days by spitting into their hands and raising their palms to the sun as an offering of self to God, others saw it a way to ward off evil. In some cultures it had a magical property.

Why do you think Jesus did this in view of the fact that he knew faith was the only real power to heal? Could the man's expectations have anything to do with this?

DEEP SIGH: In some translations the word groaned is used here. It implies that Jesus reached down deep into his own soul as he let his compassion flow from him.

Have you ever 'groaned' someone into wellness? Has someone ever done this for you?

EPHPHATA / BE OPENED: Certain words were thought to have special powers, and to use any other, such as a translation, were thought to nullify that power.

Is this example of Mark telling us the story so that we could re-experience the healing in the same way? How do your expectations play a part in what happens? Is Jesus reaching to where the man is, in order to bring him a deeper understanding of God?

EARS / SPEAK: For most of human history, if a person could not hear, they could not speak. In chapters 7-10 of Mark, we hear of eyes that cannot see and ears that cannot hear. In order to hear about his Father, the people needed to get beyond these limitations. *In these cases, a physical healing removed the obstacles. What obstacles to hearing the Word of God in Jesus exist in your life today?*

OPENED / LOOSENED: To have their ears and eyes opened; Jesus touched the people in this text. This unbound them and they could now hear the Good News of God's love.

What in this study has opened your eyes and ears in order to free you to hear more completely the good news of God's love for you?

PARALLEL TEXTS: Mk. 7:24-30 // Mt. 15:21-28; Mk. **7:26** // Mt. 8:29; **Mk. 7:31-37** // Mt. 15:29ff; **Mk. 7:37** // Mt. 15:31;

OTHER TEXTS OF THE WEEK: Is. 35:4-7; [Ps. 146:7-10](#); James 2:1-5; Mk. 7:31-37;

Revised Common Lectionary: Prov. 22:1-2, 8-9, 22-23; [Ps. 125](#); James 2:1-10, 11-13, 14-17; Mk. 7: 24-37;

SUPPORTIVE INFORMATION:

As Mark describes the healing, it involved a very intimate and intense joining and communing of bodies. His fingers went into the man's ears, he touched his tongue with his spittle. The groan of Jesus came from a deep confrontation and struggle with evil and the cost and effort demanded for freeing someone from the deafness to the word of God imprisoned in the heart. This is not a quick fix and there are no magical solutions. There are no guarantees of hearing applause for a work done well. There is simply that openness which comes from hearing "Here is you God." God is that openness. This is the hearing that opens one to become a disciple, one who can see and hear and walk in the ways God is now revealing. [Fr. David Bock](#) 9/6/15

[Sometimes the Gospel](#) writer chooses his language to make readers — at least the readers of those days — think of a certain Old Testament passage. That is the case today. Mark, in relating the story of the deaf-mute, chooses a word that appears nowhere else in the New Testament. Furthermore, it only appears once in the Greek Old Testament, the Septuagint, and that is in a famous passage—which of course serves as our first reading for today. The Greek word is mogilalos — literally meaning "hardly talking" and translated in our English version as "had a speech impediment." Later in the story (v. 35) the narration is more literal: "the impediment in his speech was removed." So we can conclude that his unusual vocabulary choice in the first instance is intended to make the reader think of the passage for which the word is famous — Isaiah 35:5-6, our first reading.

Studies have shown how populations under oppressive conditions without sign of relief can develop among its members a range of mental and physical illnesses, serving as a kind of indirect set of symptoms for the malaise of that society. Some biblical scholars have applied this perspective to the oppressive conditions of Roman-occupied Galilee. Fr. Robert Beck

7.24-30: Syrophenician woman (Mt 15.21-28). 26: Gentile, lit., "Hellenis," i.e., "Creek," here used as a general term for non-Jew. Syrophenician refers to Phoenicians from Syria as opposed to North Africa. Those nations who inhabited the land before Israel's arrival—Canaanites, Moabites, and so on—were viewed as inherently wicked and dangerous, but there were surprising exceptions, such as Ruth the Moabite, Achior the Ammonite, or the craftsmen of Tyre and Sidon, Phoenician (Canaanite) cities (1 Kings 5.1-12). Elijah and Elisha had also healed Gentiles (1 Kings 17.8-16; 2 Kings 5.H4), and at Isa 56.1-8 foreigners (and eunuchs) are accepted. The Syrophenician woman is another such surprising example; she may represent Gentile converts among the early followers of Jesus in general. 27-29: Dogs, a highly insulting name, dogs were regarded as shameless and unclean (the term is still used in a derogatory way in Rev 22.15). Jesus' first meeting with Gentiles was not successful (5.17), but after this episode his attitude becomes more open (8.1-10). 31-37: Healing a deaf man (Mt 15.29-31). In rabbinic sources a deaf person, "heresh," is often considered similar to being a minor, "qatan," or mentally ill, "shoteh"; that is, such a person is not considered responsible for observing the law (b. Yebam. 99b). 33-34: Spat. . . touched... sighed, on the physical aspects of healings in this period see Introduction. Ephphatha, Aramaic, another indication (see 5.4m.) of the original Aramaic-language versions of Gospel narratives. 36: The ironic contrast between the messianic secret and the thronging of followers is emphasized. 37: Isa 35-5-6. Pg. 75.

Levine, Amy-Jill & Brettler, Marc Zvi. [The Jewish Annotated New Testament](#). NY. Oxford Univ. Press. 2011

Kings and military men from many countries laid siege to Tyre, but were unable to take the city until, in 333 bc., Alexander the Great besieged and took it after seven months. But Tyre rose slowly again and became a center of trade in Roman times. In recent centuries, however, the place has been small. Its harbors are strewn with ruins and are little more than "a place to spread fishnets" (Eze.26:14)...spitting is a common Middle Eastern precaution against evil. A person who suspect another of possessing or casting the "evil eye" will spit to deflect or deactivate that power...Traditional healers routinely use this strategy to ward off evil. ...Mark is



careful to report the precise Aramaic word used by Jesus 'epphatah, or as reported in English translations, ephphatha. The ancients believed that words contain power. If translated, the word would lose its power. Pilch, John J. *The Cultural World of Jesus-Cycle B*. The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, MN. 1996. Page 134.

SIDON: the first Phoenician city to be founded, has long been known for the beauty of its landscape, the fertility of its plain, and the quality and variety of its fruits. Being old, it has many ruins, only a few have been excavated.

TYRE: the most famous seaport of ancient Bible lands, was located twenty miles south of Sidon, on an island three quarters of a mile from the mainland. It had two harbors, one on the north and one on the south, and its walls were exceedingly high, especially on the landward side. Here artisans made bronze, silver, and other artistic wares, and here was manufactured the purple dye that made Tyre famous. Its merchants trafficked with the many lands of the Mediterranean and even with the far away British Isles. Tyre became a "city of renown, peopled by men of the sea" (Eze.26:17).

Abila: (the number 6 on the map) is the site of Mark 3: 1. It is in Jordan and one of the cities of the Decapolis – a federation of 10 cities in eastern Palestine. Several ancient writers mention the site, including Polybius, Pliny the Elder and the geographer Ptolemy. Evidence of human habitation at Abila ranges from 3500 B. C. to 1450 A. D. A cache of early church glass lamp fragments, five churches, a life-size statue of Artemis, and aqueduct system, painted tombs and a theater. *Biblical Archaeology Review*. 1/98. Pg. 40.

Dogs were often used as a negative image in scripture. See Ps. 22:16; Prov. 26:11; Mk, 7:27. The ancient Greeks used the dog as the emblem, if not the very origin of the classical philosophy of Cynicism. The annual period of the greatest heat was suffered under the influence of the stars forming the constellation of Canis Major, and often had disastrous effects, such as the ineffectiveness of medicinal remedies ensued. A red dog was sacrificed at the beginning of the "dog days". Charbonneau_Lassay, Louis. *The Bestiary of Christ*. NY. Penguin. 1992. Pgs. 113-4.

We do reveal to one another our needs, our points of sickness, our compulsions, our sins. Thanks be to God! As painful as it is to name them, we need to recognize what needs to be healed in us. For we will never know the depths of the love and mercy of God until we have stood before Jesus – exposed, totally as we are, with no excuses and defenses – and asked for his help. As wounded as we are, if we are willing to exposed ourselves to the look of Jesus, his loving mercy will heal us. And he will not embarrass us. He will take us aside and speak the word that only we need to hear. Fitzpatrick, Mother Gail, OCSO. *Seasons of Grace: Wisdom from the Cloister*. Chicago. ACTA Pub. 2000. Pgs. 150-1.

"Three quarters of Americans believe the Bible teaches that 'God helps those who help themselves.' That is, three out of four Americans believe that this uber-American idea, a notion at the core of our current individualist politics and culture, which was in fact uttered by Ben Franklin, actually appears in Holy Scripture. The thing is, not only is Franklin's wisdom not biblical; it's counter-biblical. Few ideas could be further from the gospel message, with its radical summons to love of neighbor."

– Author **Bill McKibben**, in his *Harper's* magazine essay, "The Christian Paradox"

When Jesus walked the roads of Palestine for three years, a wondrous grace came to all who touched him. To touch Jesus, in love and sincerity, was to be healed, converted, made to walk upright, made to hear, and made to praise God. It also gave that person a place inside the community of life. To touch Jesus or to be touched by him was salvation.

SUGGESTED READINGS:

Sermon by Fr. David Bock for 9/6/15

Beck, Robert. *Sunday Homilies: Cycle B* 2015. Pgs.128-131 . To order contact Carol.Oberfoell@loras.edu

Beck, Robert. *Sunday Homilies: Cycle B* 2011-12. Pgs. 1123-126.

Aurelio, John R. *Fables for God's People*. Crossroad. NY. 1988. THE MAYBE MIRACLE: Page 65f.

benShea. Noah. *Jacob the Baker*. Villard Books, NY.1989. HEAR O ISRAEL: Page 48.

WE CAN'T HEAR WHAT'S BEING SAID WHEN OUR FINGERS ARE IN OUR EARS: Page 65f.

Shea, John. *Stories of Faith*. Thomas More Press, Chicago. 1980, IN THE DISTRICT OF TEN CITIES: Page 194-5