



We All Can Learn Something

September 9, 2012
Rev. Larry Moffet

This story in Mark's Gospel is an awkward moment. Jesus sounds harsh.

I can't wait to hear Mara's take on this story tonight at Sunday Night Live.

If there *was* any humor in Jesus' words, they have been lost in translation from his Aramaic language into Mark's Greek language and into our English. Had we been there when this happened we might have seen this was a moment of humor or a glint of warmth in Jesus' eyes. If we stick with the words as Mark writes them, it's not easy to watch this story unfold:

²⁶He entered a house and did not want anyone to know he was there. Yet he could not escape notice, ²⁵but a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately heard about him, and she came and bowed down at his feet.

²⁶Now the woman was a Gentile, of Syro-phoenician origin. She begged him to cast a bad spirit out of her daughter. ²⁷He said to her, 'Let the children be fed first; it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs.'

²⁸But she answered him, 'Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs.'

What I can say without a doubt is this: Jesus listened to the woman.

That wasn't easy. It is clear he was tired. He was trying to take a break.

In that day it wasn't the custom for a religious leader to talk with a foreigner.

There comes a time when we all get stretched. We have to make a faith leap to become who we know we are. That may be part of the point of this story. It might be good for us to see a very human Jesus realize he needed to tune into needs of someone he might otherwise overlook.

There is another truth that shines through this story. Jesus is clearly showing us that salvation begins here and now. Salvation does not mean only that we get into heaven. The word "salvation" also means health and wholeness.

Salvation is not something we wait and hope for. God is always acting for good in the lives of all God's children. Jesus sees the faith of the foreign woman, now she was truly one of God's children, and realizes she does not have to wait on Jesus' completing his work with the people he came from:

²⁸But she answered him, 'Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs.'

²⁹Then he said to her, 'For saying that, you may go—the bad spirit has left your daughter.'

God brings good out of even the worst that happens. That is true in this story. God is at work, right here, right now, in this place.

Jesus goes on to articulate how important it is to be open to what God is doing in the very next healing, a man with a severe hearing impairment.

³⁴Looking up to heaven, Jesus sighed and said to him, 'Ephphatha', that is, 'Be opened.'

³⁵And immediately his ears were opened.

Be open! That's the message from these back-to-back stories. Get involved in what God is doing. Any healing, any improvement of our lives is part of God's salvation, which is already at work now in the struggles of life. This story tells us that we all can learn something. Be open.

When we start our Methodism 101 class: A Disciple's Path, Sun., Sept. 23, we'll read this wonderful statement in the introduction pages:

“I am a follower of Jesus in the Methodist tradition because of the balance between present and future Salvation.”

“The Grace of God is constantly working in us, shaping our lives into the likeness of Christ.”¹ Salvation starts now. Salvation will be complete when things are on earth as in heaven. “Right now, God’s salvation is already a living growing relationship in which God forgives, and heals the brokenness in our lives so that we can participate in God’s healing of the world.”

Here is the Good News: God wants us to be whole.

Jesus leads the way.

All of us can learn something:

**God is at work so *all of us*
can begin becoming whole,**

no matter who we are or what we’ve done.

The Bible’s word for the process God uses to shape us into the likeness of Christ is “Sanctification.”

That term means simple that God’s love is boundless,
open to all,

available to us in every challenge,
in every moment of pain or difficulty.

When we realize God’s Grace is working in us we start working with God, and our acts of kindness,
compassion, justice, and mercy
contribute to God’s saving work.

The messiness of this story in Mark convinces me that it is real. Had Jesus been a made-up character, Gospel writers would have “cleaned this story up.” Its awkwardness conveys its real-ness. That’s sure true in my life:

Time after time, if we start to listen to people around us,

**we know what we are supposed to do
or who we are called to be.**

We all can learn something.

We won’t stop with learning. Just as the interaction with the foreign woman led Jesus to act, so our learning, our beliefs propel us to act.

Verna Dozier, an educator in Washington, D.C. who volunteered as a teacher in lots of churches and in seminaries said it memorably:

“Don’t tell me what you believe.

Tell me how what you believe affects what you do.”

That is what the writer of the Letter of James states so boldly: faith without works is dead.

¹³ judgment without mercy will be the lot of those who are not merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment. ...¹⁷So it is with faith. If good deeds don’t go with it, faith is dead.”

James had written a few verses earlier that it was wrong to treat rich people like royalty and ignore the poor. Instead, he told people

You are acting rightly if you fulfill the venerable law of the scriptures:
“Love your neighbor as yourself.”

James didn’t want those who follow Jesus to behave as if believing alone was enough. We all have something we can learn when we put our faith into action.

Fred Craddock, Bible scholar, teacher of preaching and pastor of the Cherry Log Christian Church in North Georgia tells a story of a mission worker in India near the end of World War II. Time came for his return.

His mission board wired him money to book passage on a steamer.

At his port city a boat of Jews were told they could land for a few days. European Jews were sailing all over the world literally looking for a place to live. Wanting to be off the crowded ship, the people stayed in attics and basements. It was Christmas morning.

The young missionary found an attic where 40 or more Jews were staying. He said, "Merry Christmas."

The people looked as if he were crazy and responded, "We're Jews."

"I know that," said the missionary. "What would you like for Christmas?"

They answered, "We're Jews." The missionary said, "I know that. What would you like for Christmas?" An older refugee answered, "Pastries. Good pastries, like the ones we used to have in Germany."

The missionary bought the best pastries from every bakery he could find. He used all the money his mission board sent for his trip home.

Then he wired his board asking for more money for passage to the U.S.

His superiors wired back: "Where is the money we sent you?"

His reply,

"I bought Christmas pastries for Jewish immigrants here."

Came the reply, "They're not Christians." His reply was "Yes, but I am."

**Not the crumbs from under the table,
but God's first class love.
That's the way Jesus leads us.
We all can learn something.**

¹James Harnish in our text for Methodism 101, *A Disciple's Path*

EPISTLE SCRIPTURE JAMES 2:8-17

You are acting rightly if you fulfill the venerable law of the scriptures:

"Love your neighbor as yourself."

⁹But if you show favoritism, you commit sin, and that same law convicts you as transgressors.

¹⁰Those who keep the whole Law except for one small point are still guilty of breaking all of it.

¹¹The One who said, "No adultery," also said, "No killing."

So even if you don't commit adultery, if you do commit murder, you still break the Law.

¹²Talk and behave as people who will be judged by the law of freedom,

¹³because judgment without mercy will be the lot of those who are not merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

¹⁴My sisters and brothers, what good is it to profess faith without practicing it? Such faith has no power to save.

¹⁵If any are in need of clothes and have no food to live on, ¹⁶and one of you says to them,

"Be of good cheer. Stay warm and well-fed," without giving them the bare necessities of life,

then what good is this?

¹⁷So it is with faith. If good deeds don't go with it, faith is dead."

GOSPEL SCRIPTURE MARK 7:24-37

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, ²⁵but a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately heard about him, and she came and bowed down at his feet.

²⁶Now the woman was a Gentile, of Syrophenician origin.

She begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. ²⁷He 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.' ²⁸But she answered him, 'Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs.'

²⁹Then he said to her, 'For saying that, you may go—the demon has left your daughter.'

³⁰So she went home, found the child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.

³¹Then he returned from the region of Tyre, and went by way of Sidon towards the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis.

³²They brought to him a deaf man who had an impediment in his speech; and they begged him to lay his hand on him.

³³He took him aside in private, away from the crowd, and put his fingers into his ears,

and he spat and touched his tongue. ³⁴Then looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, 'Ephphatha', that is, 'Be opened.'

³⁵And immediately his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. ³⁶Then Jesus ordered them to tell no one; but the more he ordered them,

the more zealously they proclaimed it. ³⁷They were astounded beyond measure, saying, 'He has done everything well; he even makes the deaf to hear and the

mute to speak.'

You can still register for **A Disciple's Path: Methodism 101.**

Just call the Church Office, 402 466-1906,
or leave a note in the offering plate.

Class will meet at the 9:30 hour on Sunday mornings
in Fellowship Hall, starting Sun., Sept. 23.

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