

15th SUNDAY after PENTECOST

September 5, 2021

COLLECT: GRANT US, LORD, to trust in you with all our hearts; for, as you always resist the proud who confide in their own strength, so you never forbade those who make their boast of your mercy; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever and ever. Amen.

THE LESSONS: Old Testament: Isaiah 35:4-7a

Psalm: 146

Epistle: James 2:1-10(11-13), 14-17

Gospel: Mark 7:24-37

THE SERMON: The lessons for today focus on faith, a strong belief in something. For the people in today's bible stories, it meant a strong wish and belief that Jesus had the power to heal. These people were not Jews or followers of Christ, they just wanted to get to him and have him heal them. They weren't people in the crowd, followers. They were just people who heard about Jesus and the miracles he was doing. They knew he had power; they didn't know where it came from. They didn't go to synagogues; they weren't even Jews. They heard about him and hoped he would be compassionate and heal them. Perhaps when they were actually in his presence, actually in front of him and he was listening and talking to them, that this hope turned to faith. Now that his attention was focused on them, at this point, **they believed, they knew** he would heal them.

The writer of James say it is not enough to say you have faith, these are just empty words, unless you actually do work to show it.

In the first story of the Gospel, Jesus goes to a house in Tyre. He tries to go unnoticed without drawing attention. However, a Gentile woman of Syrian descent, sees him there and she approached him. She begged him to drive out the unclean spirit, the demon from her daughter. At first Jesus was dismissive of her. He said, "Let the children be fed first." I think this means: let me do what I came to do for the Jews. He also said, "It is not fair to take the children's food and give it to the dogs." This was an insult, the Jews often referred to the Gentiles as dogs

Jesus is saying, "What I have is for the Jews, of this world, and it is unfair to share with Gentiles." The woman is insistent she says, "Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." **Perhaps**, she is saying, "Even if we are not Jews and what you have is not intended for us, we can still benefit from it."

Jesus was amazed at her answer and recognizing her faith, he told her to go home and that the demon had left her daughter. The woman returned home and her daughter was indeed healed.

For Jesus this was a revelation. Though he was rejected by some Jews, he saw that some Gentiles would recognize his divine power and believe in him.

After Jesus left Tyre, where he had encountered the Gentile woman, he went to the area of ten towns scattered to the east and west of the Sea of Galilee.

It was impossible for Jesus to slip into a town unnoticed. No matter how he tried, he would soon be discovered and the word would get out that he was there.

This story doesn't tell us where Jesus was. Was he in a house, was he in a synagogue or was he approached on the road? The scripture doesn't tell us. We only know that he was in an area, the ten cities, mostly of Gentile people. When they discovered Jesus was there a crowd of people brought a deaf man with a speech impediment to Jesus for healing. The scripture paints the man as being passive, he just follows along and does what he is told. He doesn't even try to speak.

The scripture tells us that the crowd, probably his friends, brought the man to Jesus. They begged Jesus to lay his hands on him. They believe that if Jesus anointed him, he would be healed. Normally anointing would be done with oil. Jesus took the man away from the crowd to a private area. He put his hands in the man's ears. He then spit on his fingers and put them on the man's tongue.

Once he had done that Jesus looked up to heaven and said, "Be opened." There was healing power in the hands and spit of Jesus. Immediately the man could hear and speak clearly."

You can imagine the crowd of the man's friends were amazed and happy that their friend was now healed. They said Jesus did everything well. Jesus told them not to tell anyone about what they had witnessed. However, the crowd would not be quiet about it. They enthusiastically spread the word and told others.

The man who was healed went from being passive to being active. I can imagine him saying, "I have seen the Lord, he opened my ears and loosened my tongue. I want everyone to know the good he has done for me."

Jesus dealt with people wherever he encountered them. Although he came into the world to be a Savior for the Jews, he shared his power and love with Gentiles as well. He looked into people and knew what was in their hearts and souls. He knew who had faith in him and because of this faith Jesus gave them healing.

We are not the dogs under the table eating the crumb that fall from the children's plate. We too, are the children of God. We show our faith by loving others as we love ourselves, by helping others whenever and wherever we can. We respect the dignity of all women, men and children regardless of their worship faith, their culture, their skin color, their place of birth, their social status and who they may love.

O God, you have opened our ears and loosened our tongues. Amen.

Rev. Lionel Starkes