

Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost September 6, 2015

Text – Mark 7:24-37 Theme: “The Miracle Worker”

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

You may not think like I do, but when I read today’s Gospel earlier this week, what came to my mind was the play and movie title, “The Miracle Worker.”

The Broadway stage production titled “The Miracle Worker,” came first, way back in 1959. The movies, three of them, followed in 1962, 1979, and 2000, and all were about how one, Anne Sullivan, had taught another, Helen Keller, a blind and deaf girl, how to speak and communicate.

You may not think like I do, but with Jesus in today’s Gospel expelling a demon from the Syrophenician woman’s daughter, and then curing a deaf man, won’t you agree that Jesus is every bit an amazing miracle worker?

Yet even though the second of the two people healed by Jesus is here a deaf man with a speech impediment, I still wouldn’t consider “quiet acceptance as a spiritual practice” as an appropriate heading for either this text, or even for this sermon, for that matter.

As to the deaf man, when he is healed, Jesus tells the crowd observing this miracle “to tell no one” about it – which is, yes, advice which they then promptly fail to follow (Mark 7:36).

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In fact, the more Jesus orders them to be silent, the more vigorously and vociferously they announce their admiration for this astounding work of healing, and they praise Jesus.

“They were astounded beyond measure, saying, ‘He has done everything well; he even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak’” (Mark 7:37).

And, for that matter, there isn’t any quiet acceptance in the first account, that of the Syrophenician woman with a demon-possessed daughter.

When Jesus meets her and makes the comment that “it’s not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs” (Mark 7:27), does that mean Jesus is at first reluctant to respond to the woman’s request, or does it mean that was he simply testing her faith and her resolve?

Whatever the reason for Jesus’ remark, the woman shows amazing resilience and boldness in her reply. Only a woman with considerable courage, spunk, and, yes, faith, would respond, “Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs” (Mark 7:28).

That rather sassy and clever response earned her Jesus’ respect and also the healing for her daughter that she desperately sought. Jesus said, “For saying that, you may go” (Mark 7:29).

And when she did and returned home, she found that the demon had indeed left her daughter – just as Jesus had said.

These are both healing stories, and they both take place in foreign lands, in Gentile territory, but there's even more than these two facts which bring them together in Mark's Gospel.

God does not demand or require from us only quiet obedience, or silent adoration. Being faithful doesn't have to mean passivity and a voiceless and muted existence. Oh, sure, some may think that being a "good Christian" means holding back, being reserved, and suppressing one's exuberance and strong feelings.

But Jesus here gives a man his voice and hearing, and he's not at all put off by a very bold, stubborn, and rather mouthy woman! If anything, Jesus rewards her fearless persistence by granting her request.

You may know that in the Beatitudes, Jesus says that "the meek are blessed because they will inherit the earth" (Matthew 5:5), but apparently that doesn't have to mean that those who are somewhat outspoken, tenacious, and doggedly pursue their goals are shut out from and deprived of God's blessings.

In Jesus' day, women were expected to be submissive, compliant, and even subservient.

But this Syrophenician woman refuses to cower and wilt, even in the near shadow of Jesus' power and astounding miracle-making abilities.

This determination, along with her faith, ultimately results in the healing of her daughter, which was exactly what she had sought from the beginning.

A woman, a foreigner no less, steps outside the normally-accepted parameters of conduct for her gender in that day – but Jesus blesses her anyway, by ridding her daughter of a demon.

Jesus tells the townspeople not to tell about his healing of the deaf man with a speech impediment, but they go on ahead and do it, anyway – and the text doesn't report that Jesus is upset because nobody is following his orders.

Apparently the kingdom of God is not about Jesus controlling and managing every little detail of life. No, the kingdom of God is all about Jesus the miracle worker.

The kingdom of God is about Jesus healing people. The kingdom of God is about Jesus healing people in need – people like you and me. Amen.

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus forever. Amen.

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