

Pastor Geoffrey R. Boyle
15th Sunday after Pentecost
9 September 2012
Grace-Trinity Lutheran Churches, Wichita
Mark 7:24-37

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit

Last week our Lord Jesus declared all foods clean:

So eat all the bbq pork and shrimp you like—

it's not these that make you unclean, unfit, or unholy to stand before the Lord.

It's you.

The food is fine, but you have no right to a meal with this Jesus.

No matter how clean your hands,

or how liturgical your worship,

or how many Bible verses you've memorized—

you have no right to be here.

And yet you are, and so is He, and it's all because He has called you to be here.

He invited even you to His table, to His preaching of forgiveness, to His blood, which cleanses us from all our sin, to His body, the Church, of which He is head.

And today, we hear that it's not just us—

not just those on the inside, those who have been born into this faith, grown up in these pews, or as some would even say, *conceived Lutheran*.

No, today this meal of forgiveness is even for some no-named, Gentile, Syrophenician woman, and her daughter too.

Today it's for those who are not only unworthy, but unwelcome.

It's for those who have an unclean spirit, those who are overpowered by the work and teaching of the demons; today it's even for the dogs.

The exchange between Jesus and this gentile woman is quite strange.

First of all, He's rude.

Here she asks for mercy—not even for herself, but for her daughter—

And Jesus calls her a dog:

“Let the children be fed first, for it is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs.” (Mk 7:27)

The children are the people of Israel, the rightful heirs of the promises of God.

The dogs are the gentiles, everyone else.

So to her request for mercy, Jesus gives a big, fat, “no;” and on top of it, He mocks her.

But then the woman does the unthinkable: she comes right back at Him and agrees!

Jesus called her a dog, and she confesses, “Yes, Lord, I am a dog.”

And so she quips,

“But even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs.” (28)

That's not how we'd respond.

We're not so witty.
We're not so faithful.

When someone calls us a name, we call them a bigger name.
When someone slaps our arm, we punch them in the face.

With us it's always getting even—and by even we mean getting back harder and stronger.

And if it's Jesus bringing the insult, we're sure to be offended.
We'd tuck our tail, turn our backs, and trot off—
“I'll go somewhere where I'm accepted for who I am,” we say.

But not this Syrophenician woman.
Not this gentile.

No, she doesn't want to justify herself, or get back at this Jesus, or find someone else.
She wants what He has: forgiveness, life, salvation.

And if it takes a recognition for who we really are, then so be it.
If it takes confessing that yes, Lord, we are dogs, we are unworthy to have a seat at the table—
but even the scraps, even the crumbs will do!

Let us just have a taste of that forgiveness, Lord.
Let us just nibble on a corner, we'll settle for a crumb.
Just please let your mercy come.

That's the way faith talks.
Faith admits to the truth, it doesn't hide or make excuses.
Faith confesses: who we really are, and who He really is.

And then faith eats.
Jesus lets the crumbs fall.
And more than crumbs, He gives the whole lot of it.
He cleanses the woman's daughter, He casts out the unclean spirit, He heals and He saves.

And then He does it all again a few days later for a deaf and dumb beggar.

This healing is a bit strange, too.
Not because He says, “no,” but because He goes through a whole lot more trouble than with the
Syrophenician's daughter.

With her, it simply happened.
Instantaneous.

“For this statement you may go your way; the demon has left your daughter.” (29)

But with the deaf and mute man, Jesus

“put His fingers into his ears, and after spitting touched his tongue. And looking up to heaven, He sighed and said to him, ‘Ephphatha,’ that is, ‘Be opened.’” (33-34)

Spit, ears, touch, Word.

“And his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly.” (35)

Why’d the Lord go through all the hassle if He could just make it happen instantaneously?

Why the ritual?

Why the liturgy?

Why the element, the touch, the Word?

Because that’s how our Lord Jesus wanted to bring His healing.

In both of these miracles it is the Lord who does the healing.

In both there is a cleansing, a healing, an act of divine mercy—
but it’s never us, it’s always Jesus.

One is done instantly without any clear means—it just happens, **“the demon has left her.”**

In the other there’s a list of rubrics and steps—a liturgy, a *Sacrament*.

Our Lord heals as He wishes to heal.

He casts out demons, He opens the ears of the deaf, and He opens the lips of the mute.

And the crowd reacted to it all by saying,

“He has done all things well.” (37)

And He has.

Not just for the Syrophenician’s daughter or this deaf and mute man, but also for you.

In fact, the hearing of the deaf and the speaking of the mute and the freeing of the possessed—
these are all just a taste of what He’s really got in store,
they’re an opening act for the grand finale.

These miracles prepare us for the greatest miracle of all:
that God who became man might die *for you*.

And not just for those who seem to deserve it—for as you know, none has.

But He died for the whole world, every last one of us:

for every deaf, every mute, every possessed, every sinfully rotten one of us.

He died for those whose past is shameful.

He died for those whose present is a just as much a mess.

He died for those who have a whole list of screw-ups still to come.

He died for those who haven’t gotten any better than when they first began.

He died for you.

For your sin.
For your shame and guilt and for your disgustingly oppressive, shameful, and misguided self.

He died to free you of a much greater disability than a lack of hearing or speaking.

He died so that your guilt might finally be His.
Your past shameful memories, gone, forgiven.

He died to forgive the sin you keep falling back into:
your constant drunkenness, your addictions, your anger, your loneliness.

And it's with this forgiveness that He feeds you.
Not just the scraps that fall from the table.
Not just the crumbs that the disciples labored so hard to collect into 12 baskets full.

No, He gives you His very body and His very blood for your forgiveness, for your life.

He opens your lips so that you also may declare His praise.
He gives joy to your burdened soul.
Life to your dying bodies.
Hope to your moments when it seems like you can't make it any further.

That's our Lord, full of miracles, full of forgiveness.
"***He has done all things well.***" (36)

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit