

Lectionary 23B (Pr 18)
Grace Lutheran Church
Lakeland, FL
September 5, 2021

Isaiah 35:1-7
Psalm 146
James 2: 1-17
Mk 7:24-37

Grace to you and peace from God and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Please pray with me. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Well, here we are in the discipleship season of the liturgical year. That time of year in which we take a look in the mirror to see how we are doing as followers of Jesus, those who have been called into relationship with him because of God's abundant grace.

Last week we considered the difference between membership and discipleship – membership has “privileges” while discipleship has “responsibilities.” We saw that disciples are active participants, not passive observers. And so let us see what else we may learn.

Today, in our Gospel, Jesus is in the region of Tyre. He had been working lots of overtime – he had been regularly confronted by the Pharisees and the scribes, he had calmed storms and fed thousands, he cast out demons and healed the blind. Jesus taught the crowds in parables and then explained them to the disciples. Jesus had been very busy indeed. Remember that Jesus is fully human – he was tired, very tired, and he needed some R&R. In Jesus' time, Tyre was a Gentile city which means that the people there are ritually unclean. A “good Jew” was not to associate with them for risk of also becoming ritually unclean.

Jesus enters someone's home, presumably someone he knew or had some connection with, but, still, it must be recognized that an alien entered the home of someone foreign to him. Jesus wants to be unnoticed and unseen – yet that is impossible. One who is a stranger to him, yet ANOTHER one, – a woman no less, a Syrian woman, a Gentile – comes to ask for a miracle – for an exorcism.

She comes quietly and respectfully but earnestly. She bows before Jesus and makes her request of him. And Jesus, clearly aware of their many differences, responds – Let the children be fed first for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs.

What?? Did he really call her a “dog”? Now, we can have another conversation about this slur and what it may mean, how it has been interpreted, and so forth, but that is not for today. Suffice it to say that what Jesus intended to refer to is a four-legged creature that barks. That would be what we call a dog.

Jesus' coarseness to this woman disturbs even though she wasn't a member of Jesus' tribe, so to speak. Even though she was an outsider, not a member of the church. Yes, she was probably used to being ignored or scorned. Still, this had to hurt. And she responded not in anger but in clarity – Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs.

One of the things that is different in this story from other healing stories is that Jesus does not commend her for her faith – something that is common in many of the Gospel healing stories. Often we hear the words from Jesus, “Pick up your mat and go. Your faith has made you well.”

But not here. Jesus said “For saying this, you may go – the demon has left your child.” Where is her faith? It is found simply in these next words – “so she went home.” She trusted that what Jesus said he had done had been done indeed.

Now, this would be a fine sermon, I suppose, if it ended here – all the basic elements are here – Jesus, a needy one, interaction, faith, and healing, thanks be to God. And we could go home. But, my friends, not today. You see there is more here that we need to consider as we think about this in terms of our lives as disciples.

As followers of Jesus, we each have experienced healing from him – whether it is a physical healing, or an emotional or relationship healing or a spiritual healing. And, of course, these are all intertwined many times. What I know for sure is that my life is fuller, less wounded, and less scarred because of Jesus faithful action in my life. And where there are wounds and scars, Jesus brings healing balm.

Now, remember how we have spoken about the Because/Therefore aspect of our faith life – that is, Because of Jesus’ love for us, because of God’s abundant grace poured into our lives, therefore we are called to act – because disciples are not passive observers. Because of our faith, in response to that faith, we act – we are not mere hearers of the word, but are doers also because faith without works is dead.

My friends, as disciples of Jesus we are called share the healing that we have experienced with others. We are called to be healers ourselves. And, aren’t we living in a world that needs healing!

There are two ways that we can go astray with this. One is to think that our small actions are unimportant and make no difference. Please hear these words from the poet Danusha Lameris:

I’ve been thinking about the way, when you walk
down a crowded aisle, people pull in their legs
to let you by. Or how strangers still say, “bless you”
when someone sneezes, leftover from
from the Bubonic plague. “Don’t die” we are saying.
And sometimes, when you spill lemons
from your grocery bag, someone else will help you
pick them up. Mostly, we don’t want to harm each other.
We want to be handed our cup of coffee hot,
and to say thank you to the person handing it. To smile
at them and for them to smile back. For the waitress
to call us honey when she sets down the bowl of clam chowder,
and for the driver of the red pick-up to let us pass.
We have so little of each other now. So far
from tribe and fire. Only these brief moments of exchange.
What if they are the true dwelling of the holy, these
fleeting temples we make together when we say, “Here,
have my seat.” “Go ahead – you first,” “I like your hat.”

Every small act of kindness matters. Every small act of kindness is an opportunity to be a healer. Every small act.

And at the same time, sometimes we err on the side of thinking that big things are beyond us. That we can never make a difference in the larger scheme of things. In Nelson Mandela's inauguration speech in 1994, he read from this writing by Marianne Williamson:

Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, 'Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous?' Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.

This life that we live as disciples is active. This life that we live as disciples is lived as those who have been healed by the love and grace of Jesus.

This life that we live as disciples invites us into life as fellow-healers.

Come let us do this together, inspired and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Come.

Amen.