

In our Gospel this morning, at least two things perplex me: why did Jesus order the people not to tell about the miracle he performed? And why did Jesus initially behave so rudely to the Syrophoenician woman? This behavior does not sound like the Jesus we've come to know and love and follow as our Lord. My working hypothesis is that Mark is showing us a very human Jesus and like any human, Jesus learns, changes and evolves.

Some details in the story have disappeared into the sands of time, however, other details offer a basis for conjecture. Up to this point in Mark's story, Jesus has been a busy man. He's healed a man possessed by demons, brought back to life a little girl, healed a hemorrhaging woman, tried to teach in his hometown where his mother and siblings thought he was out of his mind and those with whom he grew up had no respect for him such that he was unable to do "deeds of power." When he tried to get away, he ends up feeding 5,000 men plus women and children. Which brings us to last week's reading, where the Pharisees and Scribes caught the disciples eating with unclean hands and Jesus accuses THEM of being hypocrites. In interacting with the Syrophoenician woman, who's being hypocritical now, Jesus?

Mark tells us that Jesus went to the region of Tyre - which is a lovely spot on the Mediterranean. It is overwhelmingly gentile and fairly wealthy. I'm thinking it was a great get away spot, like Nags Head. The people in the Tyre region were not kind to the Jewish peasants who lived among them, but never-the-less, Jesus apparently thought that he could get some much needed rest and relaxation there. He counted on not being known there. Yet, the Syrophenician woman sought him out.

Upon seeing her, I imagine a number of thoughts ran through Jesus' mind. Let's suppose for a moment that she's a member of the ruling class and otherwise has every advantage. Perhaps Jesus thoughts were of contempt for someone who oppressed his people. Perhaps Jesus found her boldness unacceptable even for a foreigner. Unlike the hemorrhaging woman who just simply touched the hem of his cloak, this woman has the timidity to approach him directly on behalf of her daughter. This woman was interacting with a man - which was culturally inappropriate. We can intuit that Jesus was very tired and thus his emotional filters were not in place. We can guess that he was frustrated that even his followers didn't get his message and that those who knew him best simply did not understand what God required of them. Jesus is experiencing a vulnerable

moment, he is spent and tired. The woman is asking too much of Him. He understands his mission to be limited to God's chosen people. And so he is irritated and is abrupt to the point of rudeness and perhaps uses an epithet analogous to our own for a female dog - a word effectively used to keep a woman in her place even today.

The woman persists, accepting Jesus' premise that yes, the Children of Israel are to be served *first*, but then others may be served as well. And Jesus has his "a-ha!" moment. Scripture is full of stories where outsiders work to fulfill God's purposes, many of them women such as Hagar, mother of Abraham's first born son, Ishmael; Pharoah's daughter who rescues and raises Moses, and Ruth, King David's great-grandmother. Through this bold, audacious woman, who had faith in Jesus greater than those who knew him best, Jesus comes to understand that his messianic mission is meant to embrace the *WHOLE* world, not just as a mission to God's chosen people. Jesus is experiencing a growth opportunity! And he understands it as such. I think we do Jesus a disservice if we cannot recognize his humanity and his struggles as he lives into his mission.

So what can we learn from her? We can emulate her in our approach to prayer and our relationship with God. We can be tenacious in our faith,

we can be bold and audacious in our petitions and intercessions on behalf of others. We can let God know exactly what we desire. For example, I intend to be audacious on behalf of Syrian refugees, hopeful that all parties to the Geneva Convention will step up and offer aid. Who will you be bold and audacious for?

And what can we learn from Jesus? Sometimes it takes an outsider to reveal to us what God wants of us. Sometimes we need to be shown what our real purpose or mission is. Perhaps this is what the Diocese is doing for us as we engage with St. George's Valley Lee in determining whether and what our common ministry may be.

Which brings me to the deaf and mute man and his friends. We don't have a clue from the text whether these men are Jews or gentiles, we just know that Jesus has travelled some distance to another predominantly gentile region. Like the Syrophenician woman who petitions Jesus on behalf of her daughter, the friends of the deaf and mute man are his advocates. Perhaps to provide the afflicted man with some dignity, Jesus withdraws with him to a private place. In completely healing his body, he also restores the man to his community - especially if the man were Jewish as he would have been treated as unclean and sinful. His healing would

have absolved the sin and rendered him clean. This is a miracle of significant import and magnitude! The order to “tell no one!” strikes me as unrealistic - this is too juicy, too wonderful, too awesome to keep to one’s self until I consider that Jesus is giving an order that we can live with.

Most, if not all of us are reluctant to share with another our faith journey, to offer our own observations about how we see God at work in the world. So “tell no one” might be a relief to hear.

Consider, though, that Jesus literally “opened up” the man’s ears and his voice. Jesus has empowered him to find his voice and in his joy, he “opened up” to others! He couldn’t keep silent. What is it about our life together that we cannot keep silent about? What wonderful things is God doing in our lives, that we must share? When we go forth in the name of Christ, what is it that we do next? Is it possible for us to ultimately welcome and work with those who are different from us? Can we show that we believe that we have something to learn from those who do not seem like us? Are we able to be like the advocates in today’s Gospel and approach Christ, actively seeking the well-being of those who need help and care? Are we prepared to be equipped for this task as we take communion this morning from this table? I anticipate that our answers are an enthusiastic

“yes!” and that we can each embrace our inner Syrophoenician woman or be the type of friends that the no longer deaf mute man enjoyed. Thanks be to God!

Amen.