

## Jesus on Vacation

Mark 7:24-37

9/2/18

Jesus took a vacation. Maybe we could dress it up a little and call it a retreat or a sabbatical, but the fact is that Jesus needed some time away. He was tired of all the crowds, pressing constantly around him, demanding so much from him. After days and days of healing and preaching and teaching and dealing with his disciples who didn't ever seem to understand, Jesus needed to escape. Jesus reached the limit of his physical reserves and emotional reserves and he needed some time to recoup, to rest, to prepare for the next stage of his ministry. Jesus is clearly flesh and blood, like we are, with limits.

One of the things that people do on vacation is to take pictures. So let's go on vacation with Jesus today and see what snapshots we can collect that are worth saving. Jesus headed for a region that was mostly Gentile. Jesus may have stayed with a Jewish disciple of his. He hoped that no one would know or care who he was for a few days.

Jesus' time in incognito didn't last. A woman with a great need figured out he was in the region. Her daughter was possessed by an evil spirit -- we might diagnose it today as seizures, epilepsy. This was a woman who desperately needed Jesus' help.

This woman faced barriers. She was alone, a woman without a husband, or else he would have been the one to approach Jesus. And the division of Jew vs. Gentile was not just that Jews looked down their noses at Gentiles. Most Gentiles had an equally strong dislike for the Jews. This mother had to face religious and cultural barriers, but she loved her daughter and no one else had been able to help. So she went to Jesus. Here is our first picture. A woman who is willing to break through all sorts of barriers because of love.

Look carefully at that picture. This is not just a human image. This is an image of the divine. We are created in God's image. And this woman in her moment of desperation reminds us of God's desperate love for us. God was willing to cross any boundary and go through any obstacle to reach us, to save us and to heal us.

Consider the barriers between us and God. God is holy. We are sinners. God is all knowing. We are limited. God is eternal. We are but a moment. God is loving. We are rebellious. God gives freely. We took an entire world as a gift and rejected it by doing what God warned us not to do. So what did God do facing these barriers? God came in the form of Jesus to save us. God, the holy, all-knowing, infinite, loving giver, came to live among us, finite, limited, mortal, rebellious, greedy sinners. The snapshot of this woman is a picture that reminds us of the loving God.

The mother knocked on the door of the home and asked to see him. She didn't take no for answer and finally got access. Jesus came out and the conversation begins. She begged Jesus to help her daughter. She may well have fallen on her knees and pleaded with Jesus.

We do face challenges with this passage. Jesus' used the term dog and we might interpret that as being directed specifically towards this woman. But that is not the case. Jesus is calling all Gentiles dogs! While that might strike us as shocking, Jesus is just acknowledging the views that existed between Jews and Gentiles. Commonly each group would have expressed this kind of view of each other.

But Jesus does show this woman respect. He invites her to join him in an argument. He told her bluntly that there were things in the way. But he was responding and talking to her. That is huge. Not only was she a woman, but she was a Gentile woman and Jesus was willing to dialogue with her. By doing that he was inviting her to be more than just someone begging for help. He was inviting her to help him find the solution. She faced the barrier of culture. She spoke to him. He continued the conversation, crossing that barrier. Then he pointed to the barrier of faith and said, "What shall we do about this one?"

Here's our second picture. The picture is not just of the woman – it's of the woman and Jesus. This one shows us a wonderful picture of how we can communicate with Jesus. We come to Jesus pleading for help as we should. Yes, we are sinners, but Jesus invites us, sinful as we are to talk to him more about our problems. Jesus invites us to understand what we ask and what is involved. He doesn't turn away. He stays right with us and by encouraging us to plead our case, helps us to be even more human.

The command to pray with out ceasing and to keep on praying isn't because God doesn't hear us the first time, but because God wants us to come even closer, to ask with even more passion, to understand even more fully the depth of salvation we need, and to become even more intimately connected to the great dance of the divine.

The woman argued and wrestled with the question and with Jesus over the problem. She reminded him that even the dogs get the crumbs and that was all she wanted. Just a crumb. Just a simple healing. Just one small answer to prayer and she would go in gladness. Jesus granted her request. She went home to find her daughter healed, in peace.

There are two pictures here. There is the daughter in peace, healed and restored, a picture that reminds us of all those wonderful answers to prayer that we have received. God's blessings that have entered our life in so many ways -- financial blessings, physical healing, relationships mended. Prayer does make an impact.

But that picture reminds us of other painful pictures. What about those cases where the outcome, despite fervent prayer are not answered like we want? You have heard all the “answers” for that. God knows better. God has something else in mind. We aren't ready for that answer. Trust God, he is in control. But those answers are hard to accept when the cases are like this woman and her daughter.

Jesus knew about prayers that weren't answered as desired. Father, let this cup pass. Abba, Father, please don't make me go through this. Please don't make me bear the sin of the world. Not my will, though, but yours, Father.

There are moments when our prayers and our needs intersect with the brokenness of the world and there are not the answers we crave. In those moments, there is pain and grief. Usually when we go on vacation, we don't think about taking pictures of unhappy moments, but when we go on vacation with Jesus, he might just lead us to some difficult places. One important lesson we do learn from those painful pictures is how to show our love to others who struggle in times of grief and heartache. We know what it is to not get what we desperately want and so we can comfort others. Those kinds of pictures are not easy, but they belong in our life album with Jesus.

Jesus set out from there and headed for another Gentile region. He went to the area of the 10 cities -- Decapolis. He was once again recognized. Some people brought a deaf person to see him. Here's another picture. "They" bring someone to Jesus. That could mean at least 2 and maybe many more. Bringing someone to Jesus is not a “you” (singular) or an “I” undertaking. It involves a “they.” It involves a “we.” It involves the church.

The picture of those people bringing this man to see Jesus is exactly what the church should be doing. Each week we should be finding those who need healing, need hope, need strength, need food, need water, and bring them to see Jesus. Here Jesus, he needs food. She needs comfort. He needs healing. She needs strength to face each day. We do that in prayer. We do that by inviting people to come to church with us. We do that by cooking meals. We do that by visiting people who are struggling or sick or lonely. We do that in those unexpected moments when life interrupts our journey with Jesus, even our vacations.

Jesus healed this man as well. Even the barrier of deafness didn't stop Jesus. He did it quietly, or at least tried to. He healed the man and told him to tell no one. Take another picture. This is one of those looking back kind of pictures at a time that is no longer, thankfully, the case.

Jesus told the man to be quiet. Jesus knew that if word about him spread too far and too fast it could hurt his Father's plan for the final journey to Jerusalem. The religious and secular authorities might have stepped in too early. Or Jesus could have been sidetracked

north of Judah healing and healing with no end in sight when he needed to be heading for Jerusalem. Or the crowds might have turned on him too soon, if his healing fame had spread and he had refused to heal everyone.

But those times are over. God's plan is complete, the tomb is empty, and a new era has dawned. Our tongues have been loosed. We are now free to proclaim to the world, that Jesus is Lord and that he comes with healing and hope. Jesus has indeed left the bounds of Galilee and Judah and is proclaiming the good news in Samaria, in Tyre, in Sidon, in Marietta and on to the ends of the world. We can go into the world to tell the story of Jesus and his amazing ability to change people's lives with us. There is a picture worth taking again and again.

Perhaps you saw some different pictures in our journey with Jesus today. That's good, there are plenty more wonderful pictures waiting to be found in this story and in others. But even more important is this. In our journey, God wants to take pictures of us. We might be in prayerful supplication. We might be reaching across barriers to someone else. We might be standing against an evil spirit or loosing someone's tongue and opening their ears. Don't be camera shy. Dive freely and fully into those situations and give God plenty of good material. Step into the picture with Jesus. Amen.