

Restored - Rev. Denise Stone

Text: Mark 7:24-37

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH BIG FLATS NY, 9-5-2021

²⁴ From there he set out and went away to the region of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know he was there. Yet he could not escape notice, ²⁵ but a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately heard about him, and she came and bowed down at his feet. ²⁶ Now the woman was a Gentile, of Syrophenician origin. She begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. ²⁷ He said to her, "Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." ²⁸ But she answered him, "Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." ²⁹ Then he said to her, "For saying that, you may go—the demon has left your daughter." ³⁰ So she went home, found the child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.

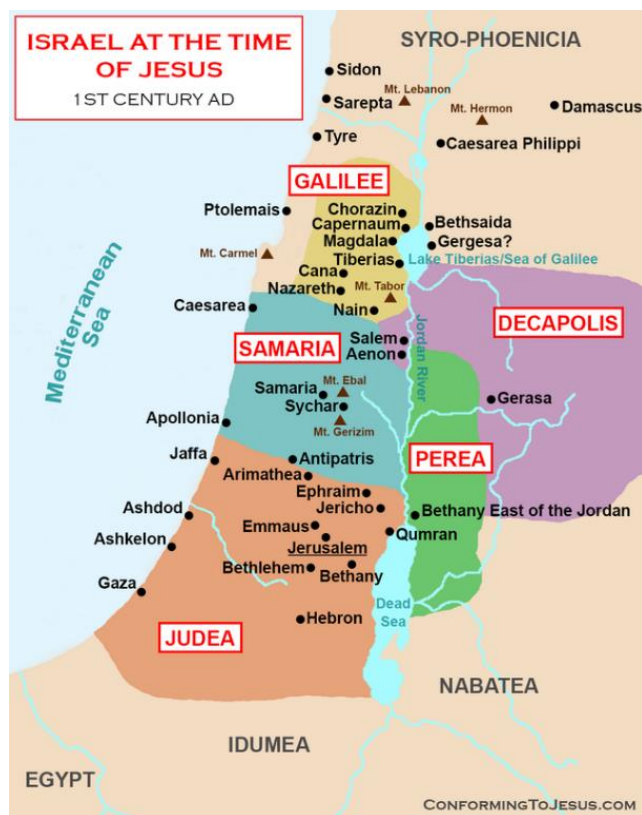
³¹ Then he returned from the region of Tyre, and went by way of Sidon towards the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis. ³² They brought to him a deaf man who had an impediment in his speech; and they begged him to lay his hand on him. ³³ He took him aside in private, away from the crowd, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spat and touched his tongue. ³⁴ Then looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, "Ephphatha," that is, "Be opened." ³⁵ And immediately his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. ³⁶ Then Jesus ordered them to tell no one; but the more he ordered them, the more zealously they

proclaimed it. ³⁷ They were astounded beyond measure, saying, “He has done everything well; he even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak.”ⁱ

The Word of the Lord
Thanks be to God.

Today we are spending some time outside of Galilee. Galilee is where Jesus spent most of his time during his years of teaching and healing.

However, in chapter 7 of Mark, we find that Jesus has left Galilee to go to the region of Tyre and then later to the area of Decapolis. The map here shows the major areas. I’ve circled Tyre, the Decapolis and Galilee so you can see the spatial relationships.



Let's start with Jesus' journey to the region of Tyre.

Why did Jesus go to Tyre?

The end of verse 24 says, "He entered a house and did not want anyone to know he was there. Yet he could not escape notice...."

There is not much explanation of Jesus's motives here. Based on what we do know about Jesus though, we can make some logical assumptions. Jesus went to Tyre to rest. Tyre is outside of Galilee. Jesus needed to get away from the crowds that always followed him as he traveled around in Galilee.

However, Jesus did not really get the rest he sought, for he could not escape notice. There is nothing in the immediate text that tells us if Jesus' disciples came with him on these two trips, but again we make an assumption that the disciples did accompany him. Certainly a group of 13 men traveling together would be hard to miss. Perhaps that is why Jesus was noticed.

It is clear that at least one woman noticed Jesus.

Tyre was gentile land. The text tells us this woman is a gentile of Syrophenician origin.

This woman did something unexpected. Remember, it was not customary for women to be unaccompanied by a male nor was it customary for women to approach a man, much less a gentile woman approaching a Jewish man.

Yet, this woman does just these things – she comes to Jesus – bows down before him and makes a request of him. She asks

for healing for her daughter. Her daughter who was possessed by a demon.

Clearly, given that social norms of the time, it was an act of desperation that led this woman to approach Jesus.

This woman comes to Jesus begging for the life of her daughter.

How does Jesus respond? Definitely not in the manner that WE have come expect of Jesus. Jesus is actually a bit snarky with this woman. Jesus emphasizes to her that he was sent first to the Israelites. He actually compares her and other gentiles to dogs. *“Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs.”*

We don’t know what was behind Jesus’ response. The writer of Mark doesn’t go into those details. But we do know that this woman was clever. She had a comeback. *“Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.”* Even dogs get to eat the scraps that the children drop at meals.

Jesus tells her that because of her response, her confidence, she can go home – the demon is gone from her daughter.

²⁹ Then he said to her, “For saying that, you may go—the demon has left your daughter.” ³⁰ So she went home, found the child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.

I want you to imagine what this woman’s life was like.

There is no indication of a husband or other male relative – or they would presumably have accompanied her on her visit to see Jesus. So, we have a single mother at a time when women had no rights or privileges. On top of that, we have a woman with a daughter who is possessed by a demon.

This woman was probably struggling to just survive.

She would have been living on the outside of her community.

One commentator suggested that this is not a woman you would have invited over for dinner.

Yet, this woman comes to Jesus for help. She is on her knees begging for healing for her daughter.

Jesus is not kind to her. Again – we don't know why Jesus responded to her in the manner he did, but we know that she persisted, and Jesus delivered her daughter from the demon possession.

Ask yourself what the result of this encounter with Jesus meant for this woman and her daughter.

I want you to hold on to this question and your answers as we consider the second half of our text for today.

From Tyre, Jesus goes to the area of the Decapolis which is to the east of the Sea of Galilee.

This was a group of 10 cities that is only mentioned in Scripture a few times. There is a significant Jewish presence, but it is not clear if the man Jesus encounters there is a Jew or a Gentile.

What we do know about him is that he is also an outsider to his community. This man is deaf and has a speech impediment. Since he could speak some, this man may have been born hearing and lost that ability somewhere along the line. Again, we're making some assumptions.

We do know that people who were disabled were thought to be that way because of some sin they had committed.

That belief alone would have made this man's life harder than just having a disability would have made it.

Verse 32 does tell us that this man had either friends or family that cared about him – **“they** brought to [Jesus] a deaf man who had an impediment in his speech; and they begged him to lay his hand on him.”

Jesus responds differently to this man than he did to the woman and even differently than we have seen Jesus respond to many of the people in scripture that he healed.

Jesus takes the man away from the crowd.

Then, quoting Elisabeth Johnson, a Lutheran Professorⁱⁱ,

In a very earthy scene, Jesus puts his fingers in the man's ears, spits, and touches the man's tongue, and then says “Ephphatha!” which in Aramaic means, “Be opened!” Immediately, the narrator tells us, “the man's ears were opened and his

tongue was released, and he spoke plainly” (Mark 7:35).

Earlier, I asked you two questions. The first one was to imagine what the Syrophenician woman’s life had been like prior to meeting Jesus.

Do the same thing with this man. What might his life have been like?

He most likely didn’t work since he had trouble communicating with people. He depended on the charity of others. While it is apparent from the text that he likely had some family or friends that looked after him, he would have still been viewed as an outcast in many ways by his community.

The second question I asked you to consider about the woman in the text was “what did the result of her encounter with Jesus mean for the woman and her daughter?”

The same question can be asked of this man. “What did the result of his encounter with Jesus mean for the man?”

Aside from being miracle stories outside of Galilee, it is this question that ties these two stories together.

What did the encounter with Jesus mean for the woman and her daughter? What did the encounter mean for this man?

The end result of their encounters with Jesus is that they are restored to their communities.

RESTORATION

In a society where everyone lived in the same basic locale for most of their lives, to not be part of the community was painful. It made life nearly impossible.

These people, these outsiders and outcasts, by virtue of the miracles that Jesus worked in their lives, would have been restored to their communities.

Jesus transformed their lives in many different ways.

Can you imagine the celebration?

Community. Restoration.

Community. Restoration.

I referenced how important community was in the first centuries when many people lived not far from where they were born.

This sense of community is just as important for people today – maybe even more important.

As I look around this room, while there are some natives to this Southern Tier Region, I see many people who have lived in different places. Some of us may not live near our earliest friends or our family members. Some of us may not have lived near our childhood home for many years. This is very typical of our society today.

It is this aspect of today's world which makes finding community so important. We have found a community here – at First Presbyterian Church of Big Flats. *This* is where we are anchored together and serve together.

Are we all alike? No.

Do we all think alike? No.

Do we share faith in Jesus Christ? Yes.

Are we committed to making the world a better place by serving our neighbors in the name of God's love? Yes.

Just as Jesus transformed the lives of the woman, her daughter and the man in today's text, Jesus has and *can* transformed **OUR** lives as well.

What do we need to do? Come to Jesus and be bold in our asking for transformation. We need to bring people to Jesus and beg Jesus for their transformation.

Last week we put together backpacks and sacks full of school supplies. This may have been a simple task. Yet, this simple task from us may be the means that a child is part of the community – they have a backpack and school supplies just like the other kids in their community.

We helped in a small way to foster community for others.

How we foster community here is all dependent on our commitment to Jesus Christ.

Do you reach out to your neighbors and check on them?

Do you check on church members who haven't been to church in a while (pandemic notwithstanding)?

Do you call people you know have been sick and/or in the hospital?

Creating community is important. Being restored to community is very important.

How will you, this very week, honor the gifts of Jesus Christ for the people of this worshipping community and this community at large?

As you consider that question, let us affirm our faith by reciting together a portion adapted from our Confession of 1967.

ⁱ Scripture quotations from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible are copyright © 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. and are used by permission.

ⁱⁱ <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-23-2/commentary-on-mark-724-37-3>.