

Sermon Thionville, France Aug 27, 2023

Text : Mark 7 24-37

English version

- “Change our hearts of stone” “Change our hearts of stone”
- Stories from the Gospel of Mark: two stories of healing. : Syrophenician woman and the deaf man
- themes : inclusion, mission, and new understandings/change

Que les paroles de ma bouche et la méditation de mon coeur soient agréables devant toi, ô Éternel, mon rocher et mon rédempteur!

- story about miracles, but not only about miracles.
 - Woman, whose daughter is possessed by demons
 - Deaf man, who speaks incomprehensibly
- Our attention is taken by the miracles, and Jesus’ supernatural power
 - Miracle stories are always a Challenge to the western mind,
 - - prefer to thank God for science and medicine as tools for healing -
 - Miracle stories seem to testify to the divinity of Jesus,
 - But even so when confronted with illness,
 - there are times when there is no medicine, miracle stories can inspire hope
 - But there are times when we hope for a miracle, often unfulfilled.
 - Miracle stories can be quite challenging
 - To our intellect, our western intellect
 - Also to our hearts, unfulfilled hopes
- But these stories are about more than Jesus and his power to perform miracles
 - They are about two people and they are about us as a community
 - Not let our attention get taken away by the miracle
- If we look at some of the details that Mark included in the telling of these stories
 - We see what Mark is trying to tell us about the Gospel, about the Good News

Inclusion

- Healing stories = (always) stories about restoration of individuals to the community.
 - Evident in stories of healing of the lepers
 - But consider the woman’s daughter: Bizarre behaviors
 - most would tell their children not to get too close
 - most would not invite this family over for dinner
 - the difficult situation the daughter was in -> led to isolation and exclusion.
 - Consider the deaf man.
 - He also was not able to participate in the community, not in the conversation of the community
 - He couldn’t hear, he couldn’t speak, inability to communicate.
 - Left out, how many of you have felt left out because of a missed email or a missed message, a failure in communication

- Our experience with COVID showed us how we can be separated from community when there is illness
- The healing of these two people meant a return to the community,
 - it meant inclusion and belonging,
 - it meant a shared identity = *healed by Jesus*
 - (no longer the one who was different),
 - it meant friendship, comradeship.

Mission

- Detail of where – Tyre and Sidon
 - The land of gentiles, outside of Israel
 - We know today - The Gospel is telling us about God's love for all people,
 - God's people were no longer only the descendants of Abraham
 - God's people were all the children of the earth, all his creation
 - What the prophet Isaiah foreshadowed
 - (when God's people were in a foreign land: a light to the nations)
 - Jesus would now make true.
 - There is no doubt that when those in the synagogues, places of worship, of Jesus' times, heard these stories, they heard loud and clear the terms Tyre, Sidon, Decapolis, Greek Syrophenician.
 - Jesus is way up north (in today's Lebanon), in Tyre, when he meets the Greek woman of Syrophenician background.
 - Then he is over on the far side of the Sea of Galilee, to the east of the sea (in what is today Syria,) when he meets the deaf man.
 - No doubt, those at that time hearing this story were hearing a story about Jesus bringing healing to people who were not, then a part of their community.
 - Can we hear these stories like those who first heard it?
 - A perfect story for an audience
 - They react to a woman approaching Jesus (a strange man)
 - They react to the fact that she is Syrophenician (less than an Israelite)
 - They nod their heads when Jesus addresses her with scorn
 - But then comes the surprise –
 - Jesus remarks on her faith
 - And goes on to heal her daughter.
 - Can you imagine the noise in the audience as people turned to each other to ask what just happened!!
 - No doubt, this story was/is about including people
 - Do we recognize our inclinations to exclude those who are different,
 - who don't fit into our realm of familiar.
 - not only those who are excluded by illness and affliction,
 - but those who are beyond the cultural, religious, social, political boundaries we draw.
 -

God's word brings Change, no where is this more evident than in the church's mission to others.

- Jesus changing
 - His delay with the Greek woman, even his mean comments about her
 - But he changes his mind
 - He has no such delay when he meets the deaf man from Syria
- Is it about God's repentance:
 - Stories of the rainbow after the flood, From judgement to Grace
 - Abraham praying for the city of Sodom
 - Jesus crying up to the sky, Ephatha
 - Or is it about change in our understanding of the largeness of God's love.
 - Damascus moment like Paul, → slow change and development
- Jesus was fully human and he experienced so much of what we experience
 - God's love breaking into the world, like light into darkness
 - Bringing us into encounters with people who are different from us
 - Giving us the opportunity to witness to the love of God
 - Changing us, changing our understandings
 - Moving us to be ever more inclusive of all people –
- Bishop of Lyon -Ireneus – came to France in around 170 AD – among the heathens!
 - “Christ came not only for those who believed from the time of Tiberius Caesar, nor did the Father provide only for those who are now, but for absolutely all men from the beginning, who, according to their ability, feared and loved God and lived justly”
 - **Le Christ est venu non seulement pour ceux qui ont cru depuis l'époque de Tibère César, et le Père n'a pas pourvu seulement à ceux qui le sont maintenant, mais pour absolument tous les hommes depuis le commencement qui, selon leurs capacités, ont craint et aimé Dieu et ont vécu avec justice.**

Mission: love and inclusion

- Who is not here, prevented?
 - Answer to this defines our mission as a church
 - Who is excluded because of illness, afflictions
 - The sick, the elderly, the handicapped.
 - Who are we beginning to have contact with who do not fit our understanding of God's people
 - Who is excluded because of our inability to be open to those who are different from us
 - People of other races, other cultures? People of other gender identities, sexual orientations?
 - How large is God's love and grace?
 - How is our understanding of this being challenged?
- The woman comes for her daughter, the man is brought

- Those who are ready to come, are the doors open
- Who needs to be brought in?
- Are the doors of the church open? Are the doors of the church open ?

Miracles?

- The greatest is God's love for each of us
- God's ability to come into our humanness
- God's incredible work of leading us closer and closer to God's Kingdom.