

KUDOS TO JESUS!

Pentecost XIV Year B

“He has done everything well; he even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak” (v. 37).

The gospel of Mark has a peculiar way of telling us about the mission of Jesus ministry to all people: the poor, the rich, Jew and Gentile. Two healing stories are related to us that are both very different and quite out of character for the “Son of the Most High God.” For the latter story, the healing of the deaf and mute man Jesus receives praise for a job well done. While we might give kudos to Jesus for his great works of faith we might not always understand the way our Lord operates.

Jesus is in the Northern region outside of his country in what is now Lebanon – a city called Tyre. There is a tension we don’t realize that exists between Jews and so called Gentiles, particularly when there is a historical animosity. The ancient historian, Josephus tells us of the Jewish War (A.D. 66 – 73) a turbulent time for Jews where not only the Roman Empire is squashing rebellion in Israel but surrounding neighbors are beating up on and killing Jews.

It is during this tension that Mark’s gospel is written and Jesus gives a curt, cold and calculating response toward a Syrophonecian woman who has heard of Jesus reputation for compassion and power. His response to her is puzzling. And like any mother would, she is begging to get help for her diseased daughter.

A frazzled young mother locked her sick toddler in the car while she ran into the pharmacy to pick up an emergency prescription. You can guess what happened: She left the keys in the ignition. It was late at night, she didn’t have a cell phone, and the pharmacy had locked its doors and pulled down its metal shutters by the time she realized what she’d done. She could see her daughter through the windows, and could hear the sound of her crying. It drove her nearly frantic and she tearfully prayed for help.

A few moments later, a young man walked past and turned to look at her in curiosity. “Can you help me?” she begged him desperately. “I’ve locked my keys in the car and my daughter is in there!” He nodded, and looked around the empty parking lot until he found an old coat hanger that he straightened.

She had never seen anything like it — it was simply amazing how easily he got into her car. A quick look at the door and window, a

couple of twists of the coat hanger and bam! Just like that, the door was open.

When she saw the door open she threw her arms around him. “Oh,” she said, “the Lord sent you! You’re such a good boy. You must be a Christian!”

He stepped back and said, “No ma’am, I’m not a Christian, and I’m not a good boy. I just got out of prison yesterday.”

She jumped at him and she hugged him again — fiercely. “Bless the Lord!” she cried. “He sent me a professional!”

Jesus was this desperate mother’s professional but his attitude toward her reflected in Mark’s gospel showed the animosity between cultures. In the church we have our own differing cultures to hold in tension much like that of the early church. The poor are the salt of the earth from where great faith is learned. The rich are those who are in a position to bring relief to the poor, to build houses of faith and hospitals and bring employment to a city.

Jesus appears to be testing this woman before he relents at her request. Before he grants her the relief for her ailing daughter he calls her a savage dog and says it is not fair to give “you people” what belongs to his children. Her reply is both wise and bold and would make any Jew proud of such hutzpah or barefaced courage. She tells Jesus that even the domesticated dogs of a master’s household get to eat the crumbs from his table. Effectively she said, “My daughter and I may be dogs, but we too howl at heaven for God’s mercy.” And as is written in the second Lesson of James, “mercy triumphs over judgment.”

Jesus, always testing for faith, releases his power to bring aid to the woman’s daughter. Here Mark’s gospel makes the point that faith can be found regardless of cultural and religious boundaries. Yet there is no doubt, that Mark wants his readers to remember that God’s people the Jews are special despite dense and doubting disciples. It may be that the statement being made, is that the most religious need the most help.

Jesus heads South from Tyre and returns to the region of the Decapolis by the Sea of Galilee where he had turned a community upside down. Recall the deliverance of the man called “Legion” because he had so many evil spirits within him. Once again, as with the woman from Tyre, intercession is made now on behalf of a deaf and mute man. And once again, Jesus displays a covert approach to

ministry and “did not want anyone to know he was there” and now “he took (the deaf man) him aside in private, away from the crowd.”

Two healings and two different approaches are recorded for us. While a word of release is proclaimed to heal the little girl at a distance, Jesus now gets “touchy-feely” up close with the deaf man. Scholars are a bit embarrassed by Jesus method here. They try to rationalize the fact that Jesus makes physical contact in weird ways with his people when necessary. It’s hard to imagine that Jesus spits at this man, may have touched his tongue to this man’s tongue, all to prove what? What he does to the man we might argue is pretty disgusting. What point is Jesus trying to make? Could he not have just said a word of release for this poor man’s humble lot in life as he did for the woman’s daughter? What point was our Lord making here by going through these gymnastics?

If there is anything we might learn today it is that our Lord is touched deeply by human suffering. And we cannot show partiality in bringing relief to those in need. God will hold us accountable for the whole law as the epistle teaches.

While he could have shrugged off a non-Jewish woman, while he could have just said the word “Be opened!” to this deaf man, God tells us through Jesus actions that He will stop at nothing to communicate our worthiness and that our needs are intimately known to him. God will not stop at a woman who would dare to dialogue in defense of her daughter’s need so His mercy might be experienced. God will not stop to communicate His mercy to a man who could not hear what Jesus was about to say, so Jesus put his fingers in the man’s ears, in and out to let him know through sign language what was about to happen to radically change his life.

God through Jesus touched the heart of a mother longing to see her daughter freed. From that day she knew there was a God in heaven who hears. God through the hands of Jesus touched a man who may have never heard a prophet, nor a scripture, nor be able to sing God’s praise. Yet from that day the deaf man of the Decapolis could say, “Kudos to Jesus!” “Kudos to Jesus!” “He has done everything well.” People of God, our Lord is merciful. May we respond to him WITH FAITH THAT WORKS! Amen.