

Mark 7:24-37, Jas 2:1-10, 14-17,

When we read the stories in today's Gospel, in context, they raise a number of questions;

Who does God love?,

Who does God want to bless?

Who is welcome in the Kingdom of God?

Jesus came as the Jewish Messiah and lived as a Jew in Judea and Galilee. His priority was to preach the good news of the coming of God's Kingdom to the Jewish people, the people of Israel.

Jesus was always friendly to the gentiles who came to him e.g. The Centurion whose servant was dying. Jesus saw the Centurion had great faith and healed his servant. But the Centurion would not have understood or been able to trust Jesus if he had not already been influenced by the Jewish faith and come to know something of the one true God.

God had been very patiently working out his plan of Salvation over the centuries. It was 2,000 years from God's promise to Abraham until its fulfilment in Jesus Christ.

Although the people of Israel were often rebellious and disobedient there were always a faithful few who knew and worshipped the Lord.

Jesus did not come into a void. Through 2000 years of revelation the Lord our God was preparing a people to receive the Messiah. The Lord our God is like a good farmer who prepares the soil to receive the seeds he wants to plant.

St Paul says in Galatians [4:4] "When the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law." What Jesus was doing could only be understood in that Jewish context.

In his preaching to Israel Jesus was sowing the seed of the kingdom in the seed bed that had been prepared over the 2,000 years since Abraham.

God revealed Himself to Abraham and Abraham responded in faith and obedience.

God promised Abraham,

**"I will bless you and make your name great so that you will be a blessing"** [Genesis 12:2].

The people of Israel saw themselves as Abraham's descendants and heirs of the promises.

There were different expectations amongst the first century Jews of how the promises would be fulfilled.

**The priests** in the temple saw themselves as Israel's saviours by keeping on good terms with the Romans. They saw Jesus as dangerous.

**The Pharisees** expected salvation to come by everyone keeping their interpretation of Old Testament law. They rejected Jesus because he was undermining their interpretation of the rules.

**The Nationalists** wanted a Messiah but rejected Jesus because he refused to be a military leader.

All of the groups regarded Israel as chosen by God and spoke disparagingly of outsiders as "Gentile dogs". They had lost sight of God's purpose for them to be a blessing to all people.

Yet there were people in Israel who were hungry to hear and ready to believe As St John wrote, **"He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive Him. Yet all who did receive him, to those who believed in His name he gave the right to become children of God [John 1:11-12]."**

But returning to the Gospel reading, if Jesus was so committed to Israel why did he suddenly leave Galilee taking His 12 Apostles and travel North to the Gentile area of Tyre?

There were good reason for the move:

- King Herod had just beheaded John the Baptist and started to ask questions about Jesus.

- Wherever Jesus went in Israel the crowds followed him wanting miracles. No peace to teach
- After the feeding of the 5,000 the Jewish nationalists, who were committed to driving out the Romans wanted to take Jesus and make him King by force.
- The recognized Jewish leaders were constantly attacking Him and stirring up controversy.
- As the end of Jesus earthly ministry drew near he needed time to teach his 12 Apostles.

#### **Show Map**

They set out on a journey, not so much to go somewhere as to get away from Judea & Galilee. There were three distinct Journeys.

The area of Tyre and Sidon was in the Roman province of Syria. There were scattered groups of Jews living in the area of Tyre. Jesus was known far and wide. There would be people to welcome Him and offer hospitality.

Mark only records two events from this journey but we can work out from the other Gospels that the journey may have lasted 8 months. It was primarily a time of retreat for Jesus to prepare his Apostles for when he would no longer be with them.

If we read this story of the Syrian Phoenician woman out of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century context it will appear Jesus was uncharacteristically rude or harsh. Jesus is normally so gentle & respectful of women.

Why did Jesus hesitate to give the lady what desperately needed?

Matthew [15:21] also tell this story and includes a helpful bit of information. The lady came saying,

**"Lord, son of David, have mercy on me!"**

She was using a Jewish title, was she claiming to be and insider? Jesus answered,

**"let the children be fed first,  
for it not right to take the children's bread  
and throw it to the dogs."**

"Dogs" was used as a term of abuse by the Jews of the non-Jews, the Gentiles. Jesus does not use the same word but a friendlier word for house pet.

It doesn't seem so cold in the 1<sup>st</sup> century Greek context. The lady herself doesn't take offence but takes up Jesus' words in a playful way.

Jesus is giving the lady an opportunity to show on what basis she is asking for her daughter's healing, **"Let the Jews eat first and then the Gentiles will be fed."** Jesus answered her in a way that she could understand and engage with. It gave her hope.

She comes back wittily,

**"Let me have what they don't take up."**

How different she is to the Pharisees who Mark Robinson spoke about last week.

Who does God love

Who does God want to bless?

Who is welcome in the Kingdom of God?

This story illustrated just what Jesus had been teaching. This desperate lady would have failed all the Pharisees tests of rule keeping.

She wasn't from God's covenant people - not a Jew

She was not from Judea - she was a foreigner.

She was not observing the law in the Pharisaic way.

Yet in her non-Jewish heart there was faith.

She showed an insight into the love & power of Jesus, which the critical religious leaders lacked.

Wherever Jesus finds humble faith there will be blessing and a welcome. This complete outsider put into a nutshell her confidence in Jesus welcome.

**"Yes Lord, but even the dogs under the table  
eat the children's crumbs."**

Her words find an echo in our communion prayer.

**"We are not worth so much as to gather up the  
crumbs from under your table."**

Jesus accepts it. It shows her faith and longing. J

She doesn't try to bargain with Jesus.  
She only presents her daughter's need in faith and  
Jesus graciously answers with healing power.

### THIS GIVES ME COURAGE.

We may not come to Jesus claiming to be worthy.  
No one can claim to be good enough to be allowed  
into God's Kingdom. **BUT** we do come because we  
know that our God is gracious and will not turn away  
those who come to him in faith.

No matter how weak, confused or ill-informed our  
faith is, our Lord Jesus recognizes at once the cry  
of genuine faith.

When Jesus travelled on He didn't return directly  
to Judea or Galilee but travelled via Sidon and  
through Syria to another Gentile area called  
Decapolis because of the 10 Greek cities there.  
Jesus was met by another needy Gentile. The man  
could not ask to be healed or verbalize his faith -  
deaf and dumb. His faith was seen in his coming to  
Jesus with his friends. Jesus took the man aside.  
His healing was not to be made a public spectacle.  
Jesus communicates with the man through sign  
language. *Finger in the ears, touching His tongue  
and spitting out the impediment*

*Jesus looks to heaven.* Healing comes from His  
Father. "Ephphatha!" - "Be opened" -  
The man was healed - Hearing & speaking plainly.  
The Lord our God speaks in ways we can understand.

Isaiah [35:5-6] had prophesied that when Messiah  
came

**"the eyes of the blind would be opened,  
and the ears of the deaf unstopped:  
then shall the lame man leap like a deer,  
and the tongue of the mute sing for joy."**

The Jewish leaders had rejected Jesus despite his  
many miracles performed in Judea and Galilee.  
But this Gentile crowd spot the significance of  
Jesus' actions. V37 "He has done everything well".  
Jews and Gentiles, all people are welcome, everyone  
who comes in humble faith.

Jesus is the Saviour who has come to bless us and  
set us free from all that binds us. He opens our  
ears to hear the good news.

### PRAYER

Father God we thank you that our Lord Jesus is  
able to bring you lives back into harmony with you.  
Help us to be open to receive what you want to give  
us and to live our lives in your service. Amen