

## Order of Service for September 5, 2021 - Pentecost 15

### GATHERING

#### **Gathering Song - 859, Praise to the Lord, the Almighty**

Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of creation!

O my soul, praise him, for he is your health and salvation!

Let all who hear now to his temple draw near, joining in glad adoration!

Praise to the Lord, who o'er all things is wondrously reigning  
and, as on wings of an eagle, uplifting, sustaining.

Have you not seen all that is needful has been sent by his gracious ordaining?

Praise to the Lord, who will prosper your work and defend you;  
surely his goodness and mercy shall daily attend you.

Ponder anew what the Almighty can do as with his love he befriend you.

Praise to the Lord! Oh, let all that is in me adore him!

All that has life and breath, come now with praises before him!

Let the amen sound from his people again. Gladly forever adore him!

*(Hymn lyrics printed under CCLI Licence # 11411292)*

#### **Greeting**

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit, be with us all.

#### **Kyrie**

We confess that we are too eager to judge others, and claim forgiveness for us. Lord, have mercy.

We confess that we have turned our backs on the image of God in our neighbours. Christ, have mercy.

Beginning today, we claim mercy for *others*; we claim *responsibility* for ourselves. Lord, have mercy.

#### **Prayer of the Day**

P - Let us pray. Gracious God, throughout the ages you transform sickness into health and death into life. Open us to the power of your presence, and make us a people ready to proclaim your promises to the whole world, through Jesus Christ, our healer and Lord.

C - Amen.

### WORD

#### **Gospel Acclamation**

P - Alleluia. Rejoice in the Lord always.

C - Again I will say, rejoice. Alleluia

#### **Gospel Reading** Mark 7:24-37

P - The holy gospel according to Mark.

P - 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, but a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately heard about him, and she came and bowed down at his feet. Now the woman was a Gentile, of Syrophenician origin. She begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. 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.” But she answered him, “Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs.” Then he said to her, “For saying that, you may go-- the demon has left your daughter.” So she went home, found the child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.

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. They brought to him a deaf man who had an impediment in his speech; and they begged him to lay his hand on him. He took him aside in private, away from the crowd, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spat and touched his tongue. Then looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, “Ephphatha,” that is, “Be opened.” And immediately his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. Then Jesus ordered them to tell no one; but the more he ordered them, the more zealously they proclaimed it. They were astounded beyond measure, saying, “He has done everything well; he even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak.”

The gospel of the Lord.

## Sermon

Mark's version of the Jesus story, is in some ways, the simplest and most straight forward of the gospels. And yet there are layers in the way he tells his story, which reveal an awful lot going on just below the surface, both for Mark, and for the community to whom he wrote. And for us, too!

The first thing to remember is that when Mark tells a miracle story, he is attempting to demonstrate that Jesus has authority: over illness, over demons, over life and over death. Jesus having authority is a major emphasis for Mark, and we can see it in these stories today.

The other thing to watch for in these stories is the way Jesus confronts the situations which present themselves. Jesus is not just “responding” to things which happen to arise. He is actively going out and **confronting** those parts of life which are denying life. The Jesus that Mark presents is **not** passive! Mark's Jesus asserts his authority by going after those forces. These stories, even when they are about healing, are equally about confrontation.

Simply reading through this passage, it is obvious that there are two stories, and they both start out the same way - Jesus is travelling.

*Verse 24 From there he set out and went away to the region of Tyre.*

*Verse 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.*

Jesus spent much of his ministry in the north of what, today, we call the country of Israel, in the area around the Sea of Galilee, which was known **as** Galilee. But in this section, Jesus leaves Galilee and goes into territory which is not predominately Jewish. The people who lived there were Gentiles, foreigners. They would have been looked at “Other” by Jesus' contemporaries. The fact that Mark tells of Jesus going to these “Others” would have been pretty affirming to Mark's readers, who were almost certainly Gentiles.

And here Mark does something interesting.

*Verse 24 He entered a house and did not want anyone to know he was there.*

*Verse 36 Then Jesus ordered them to tell no one....*

Mark **begins** the first story with Jesus wanting to be anonymous, and he **ends** the second story the same way. Mark does a lot of this in his gospel. It's called “Bookending.” He begins with something, a statement or the start of a story, he has something happen in the middle, and then he goes back to that initial statement or story to finish up.

What he's doing is telling us, his readers, that, in his mind, these are really one story. They are making the same point, even if some of the details are slightly different. He's calling our attention to the fact that this is one unified narrative, and he's inviting us to look for points of connection within these stories.

*Verse 24 He could not escape notice,*

*Verse 25 but a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately heard about him, and she came and bowed down at his feet.*

*Verse 26 Now the woman was a Gentile, of Syrophenician origin. She begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter.*

And

*Verse 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.*

These Gentiles, these people who are "Other," approach Jesus, even when he doesn't want to be noticed, and ask him for help. And in reality, it's more than that. They "**beg**" him for help. Begging is not a common sight on the streets of Lunenburg, but it's not unheard of. People come to the door of the parsonage asking for help. And even if you haven't had that happen at your house, all you have to do is drive into the city, and on any number of street corners there will be people walking up and down the line of stopped cars with an empty coffee cup in their hand and a sign around their neck saying, "Please help."

People who are forced to beg are in an incredibly difficult and humiliating situation. Most of them simply do not see any other options. So they open themselves up to abuse and scorn for the sake of some loose change.

In a very real way, they have, for the moment, turned the tables on Jesus! **They** are ones doing the confronting here! They are confronting him with their need. They, too, are experiencing the life denial which Jesus is trying to confront, and so they say, "Ok Jesus, what about us?"

And now the confrontation gets intense. **Really** intense! In both of these cases, Jesus doesn't respond the way the people expect or want. Let's be honest; Jesus doesn't respond the way **we** expect or want!

In the first case, he says,

*Verse 27 "Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs."*

*Verse 28 But she answered him, "Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs."*

Preachers have tied themselves up in knots over the years, trying to make this somehow better. They have said, "He was really saying the word for 'puppies,' so he's really kind of winking at this woman."

No he's not. "You son of a Canaanite dog" was the worst insult that the Jewish people had to describe their "different" neighbours. It's the equivalent of someone describing our Indigenous neighbours as "those lazy drunken Indians," or calling people of mid-African descent, "niggers." There's no way to make this better; there's no way to make this ok.

I've also heard people claim that Jesus used these words because they would have been familiar to the disciples, and he was trying to confront **them** with their own racism. But that doesn't work, either, because if you look at these stories, the disciples aren't even mentioned. The way Mark tells these stories, the disciples aren't even there!

And what are we to make of the woman's response? She seems to take this abuse as a matter of course. What's up with that? How is any of this ok?

It seems to me that all we are left with is questions. Are we being confronted with a Jesus who is simply tired and a bit cranky? Who is resentful that he's not getting his expected "alone time"? Are we being confronted here with a Jesus who struggled with being a racist? Are we being confronted with a Jesus who needed to *learn*, learn things like empathy, or compassion, or something else?

And in the second story, Jesus doesn't behave the way the crowd wants, either.

*Verse 33 [Jesus] took him aside in private, away from the crowd....*

We have all grown up with admonitions to "Let your light shine." We come to worship on Sunday morning as a public statement that this church stuff, this faith stuff, is important to us. We recognize that, even if we are uncomfortable in front of crowds, we are called to be public Christians. We are not called to hide it; we're called to share it.

So what in the world is Jesus doing taking this physically challenged individual away and into a closet to provide healing? Isn't he supposed to confront the powers wherever they *are*, and demonstrate his authority over them *publicly*? Isn't that what his ministry was all about?

And I think it is safe to assume that the crowd wasn't overly impressed with this part, either. They brought this guy to Jesus in the hopes that he could help, *and* in the hopes that they would be able to *see* his authority over all of the life-denying forces in their part of the world. And all they get to see is Jesus going around the corner, and 'doing his thing' in private.

Again, was Jesus just tired? Was he impatient with the crowd who wanted to see a live performance? Was he frustrated with people who wanted to learn his healing formula so they could do it as well? Had he just had enough of all these people with all their needs?

I don't know. I don't have the answers to these questions. I don't have a way of making any of this better. Mark's Jesus doesn't live up to *anyone's* expectations; least of all, *ours*. Mark is confronting us with a Jesus who is a mystery, and we just have to come to terms with that.

And now that we are all completely confused, and don't know *what* to expect, or even what to *look* for, Jesus confronts us again.

*Verse 29 Then he said to her, "For saying that, you may go--the demon has left your daughter."*

*Verse 30 So she went home, found the child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.*

And at the end of the second story,

*Verse 34 Then looking up to heaven, [Jesus] sighed and said to him, "Ephphatha," that is, "Be opened."*

*Verse 35 And immediately his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly.*

Jesus *does* bring healing to these hurting people. Jesus *does* demonstrate his authority over all the life-denying forces which surrounded those people, and which surround us. But what a way to do it!

Being confronted by Jesus is not an easy thing. It will throw us into confusion. It will call into question our most basic assumptions. It will be *hard!* And there is no way out of that.

And now, the other bookend. But notice that it doesn't end there.

*Verse 36 Then Jesus ordered them to tell no one; but the more he ordered them, the more zealously they proclaimed it.*

*Verse 37 They were astounded beyond measure, saying, "He has done everything well; he even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak."*

Being confronted by Jesus *will* leave us changed, in ways we can't *possibly* predict. It will leave us with more questions than answers. It will leave us in some discomfort over what we have learned. And even when this confrontation results in healing, that healing will leave us in a very different place than where we started.

Who knows! It may even result in *our* being able to hear, in *us* being able to speak. Amen.

## RESPONSE TO THE WORD

### Hymn of the Day - 726, Light Dawns on a Weary World

Light dawns on a weary world when eyes begin to see all people's dignity.

Light dawns on a weary world; the promised day of justice comes.

*Refrain*

The trees shall clap their hands; the dry land gush with springs;  
the hills and mountains shall break forth with singing!

We shall go out in joy, and be led forth in peace,  
as all the world in wonder echoes shalom.

Love grows in a weary world when hungry hearts find bread  
and children's dreams are fed.

Love grows in a weary world; the promised feast of plenty comes. *Refrain*

Hope blooms in a weary world when creatures, once forlorn,  
find wilderness reborn.

Hope blooms in a weary world; the promised green of Eden comes. *Refrain*

*(Hymn lyrics printed under CCLI Licence # 11411292)*

### Prayers of the People

A - Trusting Jesus' promise that we will be heard, we offer our prayers for the world God loves,  
the church God calls, and for all people according to their needs.

*[Short pause]*

A - Holy One of gracious confrontation, Jesus is always a challenge, no matter how long we have  
been following. Open us to this challenge. God who is with us,

C - Hear our prayer.

A - Holy One of gracious confrontation, it is difficult to remember that we are still called to grow.  
Free us for the journey we must still make. God who is with us,

C - Hear our prayer.

A - Holy One of gracious confrontation, it is hard when our assumptions are exposed to the light,  
and we are forced to admit our need. Remind us that your light is love, and your purpose is  
healing. God who is with us,

C - Hear our prayer.

A - Holy One of gracious confrontation, you continue to invite your church to honest reflection  
on who we have become. Call us again to ourselves, that we may more faithfully be your  
people. God who is with us,

C - Hear our prayer.

A - Holy One of gracious confrontation, your presence is found in all the uncomfortable  
confrontations of life: broken relationships, disappointed hopes, declining health, approaching  
death. Use your people to show your loving presence to all whom we name before you.

*[Long pause]*

God who is with us,

C - Hear our prayer.

A - Holy One of gracious confrontation, continue to get in our way; continue to disturb us; continue your loving journey toward us, that we learn again to trust your coming. God who is with us,

C - Hear our prayer.

P - We ask all this in the name of Jesus, the Christ, our Saviour and Lord, who continues to teach us to pray,

### **Lord's Prayer**

C - Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread, and forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial, and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen.

### **SENDING**

#### **Benediction**

P - May almighty God,  
The Father who created us to live in love,  
The Son (†) who died and rose to bring us new life,  
And the Spirit of gracious confrontation,  
bless us all, now and forever.

C - Amen.

#### **Sending Song - 719, Where Cross the Crowded Ways of Life**

Where cross the crowded ways of life, where sound the cries of race and clan,  
above the noise of selfish strife, we hear your voice, O Son of Man.

In haunts of wretchedness and need, on shadowed thresholds dark with fears,  
from paths where hide the lures of greed, we catch the vision of your tears.

From tender childhood's helplessness, from human grief and burdened toil,  
from famished souls, from sorrow's stress, your heart has never known recoil.

The cup of water giv'n for you still holds the freshness of your grace;  
yet long these multitudes to view the strong compassion in your face.

O Master, from the mountainside make haste to heal these hearts of pain;  
among these restless throngs abide; oh, tread the city's streets again;

Till all the world shall learn your love, and follow where your feet have trod;  
till glorious from your heav'n above shall come the city of our God.

*(Hymn lyrics printed under CCLI Licence # 11411292)*

#### **Dismissal**

P - Go in peace. Confronted by love.

C - Thanks be to God!

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