



Hear the Word

from Pastor James N. McEachran



Gather... Encourage... Equip... Send...

Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost

September 9, 2018

At the Boundary. A Lesson in Mission and a Vision for All.

Mark 7:24-37

Ever been to the boundary? Cross a line? Move into a new space? Boundary lines often define us:

- ✠ **Country**. (Better have a passport when you can see the Peace Arch)...
- ✠ **State**. (Our children loved going into Oregon, crossing the Colombia, half way across the bridge, Erin would look at Alyssa in the backseat and teach her that they were in two different states)...
- ✠ **City**. (Entering Bellevue means home)...
- ✠ **Neighborhood** (We live in Collingwood-Whispering Heights, just below Hill Top)...
- ✠ On a summer trip to Bellingham, we toyed with the language of boundary. I said, "We crossed from Whatcom to Skagit to Snohomish to King and we all knew that meant four boundaries!"

In the Gospel just read, Jesus is at the boundary. The words seem so simple. "(Jesus) set out and went away to the region of Tyre." Gentile country and the story is one that demands a time of new insights...about our mission and a vision for all!

Here is the plot development:

1. In Mark 1-5, Jesus is mostly about situating His mission with the 12 through teaching and healing; most of it takes place in Galilee.
2. In Mark 6, Jesus come to Nazareth, His hometown, and finds resistance and is rejected by those who knew him well.
3. Jesus moves out and teaches as the disciples go out two by two faithful and successful in mission;
4. News is received that John the Baptist has been killed, the disciples, now called "apostles", bring their report, try to go to a restful place, great crowds follow, and Jesus has the disciples serve a meal to 5000+ with leftovers; and He crosses the sea to Bethsaida of Galilee. (Recall that Galilee is the primary site of Jesus' ministry.)
5. The Pharisees confront Jesus on His purity practices. (Clean and unclean---boundaries)
6. Jesus crosses a boundary, heads way north to Tyre, Gentile land, seeks refuge and rest in a home to avoid the ever present crowds, and He is met by a Syrophoenician who is insistent that her daughter be made well.

And here is the ultimate pivot story that points to the life of the followers of Jesus who are called to **envision, enfold, enact** and move into a new matrix which will include all into the promise of salvation, freedom, forgiven new life rooted and fed by love.

Here it is; three people= Jesus, a very insistent woman, and a little girl. Always struggle a bit with this story---but it is critical to how the Roman house churches, which were rooted by converted Jews who struggled at first with inclusion came to be in full acceptance of all into the Body of Christ, the Church.

THE WOMAN. She is in a unique status and role as a woman who is Gentile, unclean times two; yet, having heard about Jesus and His healing power, she meets up with Jesus in the privacy of a home. Where He has sought a time away.

Now get this. She is the **ONLY** person in all of Scripture to argue with Jesus. Shameless audacity, hutzpah! She is witty, wise, and turns truth even to Jesus.

THE CHILD. A daughter with an extreme malady, noted to be an “unclean spirit.” A mother seeks healing, having heard about Jesus, and it is an act of faith that “she came and fell at his feet.” An act of worship! And an appeal to “cast out” the demon from her daughter.

JESUS. And it comes to this! Ready? “Permit first the children to be filled (not exclusion of Gentiles, but a teaching that the covenant is first for the line of Abraham), for it is not right to take the bread of the children and to throw it to the puppies.”

The woman persists, “Lord, (not merely “Sir”) even the puppies under the table eat from the scraps of the children.”

It is well to read the full context of the story that the outcome is that she is instructed “on account of what you have said,” to go home and find your daughter healed.

Reminding us, beyond this story, that in the Old Testament, there is always the pop up that God’s story is the story first to the Jews. As in “a light to lighten the gentiles and the glory of your people Israel.” Mission/Vision...maybe we do well not to note “local” and “global,” but simply highlight the universal call to witness to everyone when we can, while we can, until Jesus comes again! And our account speaks truth in a time when the first who heard would recall that the people of Tyre lived as the enemy as the people of Galilee whose goods they plundered and whose harvests they stole! (bread/crumbs are cues!)

Jesus returns to Galilee and heals one who cannot hear or speak. (A miracle found only in Mark!)

It is fascinating to me that the next story is about “Being opened!” A man is healed who is deaf and barely able to speak. But, healed can hear and speak the truth of all included in the call of Jesus which is the mission of the Church for those who have ears to hear, eyes to see, and whose lives are a witness to healing and life!

But, wait, in Mark 8, after all of this, Jesus is pushed by the crowds **WHO MAY HAVE FOLLOWED FROM GENTILE COUNTRY and AFTER THREE DAYS WERE HUNGRY.**

So Jesus, one more time, feeds 4000 (or so) and there are 7 **NOT** 12 baskets of leftovers to be shared.

To those who read the numbers, “7” is the number given to all the nations who were not part of the 12 tribes of Israel. **ALL HAVE A PLACE IN THE PROMISE OF GOD WE KNOW IN JESUS AND THROUGH THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.**

In a sense, we are this day at a boundary. It is looking like fall, leaves are turning and there is that in-our-face moment that the rhythm of our lives are ever changing, but we are those who are about the work of worship, that leaves us with the courage, and equipped, to go and be the Body of Christ in world.

In Babylon, those in Exile were told that a boundary of exile would give way to the God who named and claimed and told them to "Be strong!"

In the times when churches were formed, James shared the call first and foremost to lives into and out of the royal law of love to "love your neighbor as yourself." Walking, living, with peace, joy, and peace which becomes the work of the Spirit that others might be enfolded into this family.

Then, to walk across the boundary of the threshold of this worship space, into our common area called "narthex." To enter again in the world that Jesus died for, lives for, and loves through the sharing of the gifts we have been given to give away every single day.

And begins again today, at Font, in Word, at Table. We are Gathered! And filled up with the Light and Love we share to serve until we meet again.

To each one we meet, this song---

*WILL YOU LET ME BE YOUR SERVANT,
LET ME BE AS CHRIST TO YOU?
PRAY THAT I MAY HAVE THE GRACE TO
LET YOU BE MY SERVANT TOO.*

AMEN!