

Be Opened, A Command for us

It's hard for us to imagine isn't it? Jesus Christ actually calling someone who has come to him seeking help, a dog! Yet in the Gospel lesson today that's exactly what we find happening. The Book of Mark goes to great lengths to show us that the woman is not a descendant of the Jews and does not live in a Jewish settlement. She is a Greek from Syrophonecia. And she has come as an unwelcome guest to seek aid for her daughter. Jesus lets her know in rather strong some might say offensive language that she is in effect jumping the line and trying to get ahead of the people who are in line ahead of her.

How many times in our lives do we find ourselves pushed to the limit, on a deadline, or weighed down by the seemingly endless demands of day to day life---just wanting a little piece and quiet, and here comes someone wanting something else from us. We might get a little upset right? We might tell them to come back later, or say that we are all given out right now. We might even call them some unflattering name. After all we are supposed to be like Jesus aren't we? What's going on here? Why does Jesus do what he did?

I believe that Jesus was testing this woman to see if her need was genuine. Indeed from her response she recognized the test, and answered well. She could have become indignant and walked away, but she remained humble and persistent and her daughter was freed from the evil spirit. We can learn a lot from this woman whose love for her child gave her the courage to stand before Jesus himself and ask for the help she needed. Humble persistence even in the face of a hostile negative response will pay off in the long run.

The Gospel lesson doesn't end here. The scene shifts back to the Sea of Galilee and Jesus is presented with a man who is

deaf and has a speech problem. It is very likely this man and his friends are Jewish. First because of the previous story, if the deaf man was not a Jew Mark would have said so. Secondly because the request the lay hands on the man is a typically Jewish custom. Unlike the preceding miracle where Jesus told the woman to go home because her daughter was healed, here Jesus takes the man away from the crowd and physically puts his fingers in the man's ears, then it says he spits and touches the man's tongue. He sighs toward heaven and says "Be opened!" Then after what is probably the most exciting moment in the deaf man's life, Jesus tells this man who can suddenly hear and talk not to talk about the miracle to anyone. But the man was so happy that he told everyone he could. The woman I'm sure told everyone she could about her daughter's healing too.

How do we fit into these two stories? What lesson is there for the 21st Century Christian? We must remember that when we pray to our God in Heaven we are no more worthy of a blessing than that Gentile woman. And yet as Jesus was willing to do what she requested, so will he be willing to hear our needs and help us. We must be humble and we must be persistent. We must be unselfish and we must ask in such a way that we believe we are going to get the answer we want.

When we became Christians, we experienced the same miracle the deaf man experienced. Our ears were opened so that we could hear the call of God's voice; and our tongues were loosed so that we could use it to sing God's praise and tell his story!

This week will mark 17 years since terrorist destroyed billions of dollars of property and took thousands of lives here in the United States. Sometime during the week either on

September 11th or whenever it's convenient, take time to pray for our country. Pray for the families of those who lost loved ones, and for the soldiers and their families who are fighting that war against terrorism right now. We also need to pray that God will open the hearts of those who hate Christians so that their tongues will be loosed to sing songs of praise instead of chants of war. Pray with the same perseverance of the gentile woman, and let Jesus open your ears to his voice and your tongue to his words. This week will be difficult for many as I'm sure the networks will replay the images of burning and crumbling buildings. We all need to be open to what Jesus wants us to hear and do as we seek to serve him and our neighbor. Ephesians 1: 15 – 20

¹⁵ For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God's people,

¹⁶ I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers.

¹⁷ I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better.

¹⁸ I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people,

¹⁹ and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength

²⁰ he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, (Eph 1:15-20 NIV)