September 6, 2015

Mark 7:24-37

On the Mend: Healing What Ails Us – Healing Inhibitions

Rev. Kerry Smith

Greenland Hills United Methodist Church

Mark 7:24-37 New Revised Standed Version

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 Syrophoenician 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.” 30 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.”

This fall we are talking about being on the mend. How can we uncover the wounds that hold us back from the fullness of life? We will hear stories of Jesus healing and speaking about what brings wholeness. We will talk about moving out of old ways of being into new possibilities of being.

This week I have been thinking about the events of 10 years ago with hurricane Katrina. I was a new mom 10 years ago, my daughter was 2 months old and there was not a lot of sleep happening. I remember on August 31 watching the news and finally the people who had been stranded in New Orleans were on their way to shelter. And the newscast ended with the newscasters saying that as the shelters filled up in Houston, the Katrina survivors would be heading north to Dallas.

I was the pastor of Krum United Methodist Church at the time and we lived in the parsonage right next door to the church. And our church was designated as a Red Cross Disaster location. So, as I went to bed that night it was on my mind that our church might be called to serve some of these folks who had endured so much in New Orleans and in the Superdome.

My beautiful 2 month old daughter woke me up a few times in the night, and at 5 am she was awake for the day. As I walked into the dining room, I could see that there were cars at the church, so I quickly changed out of my pajamas and went outside to welcome these folks to our church. It was still pretty dark out, but I greeted the first person I saw and introduced myself. I welcomed him to our church and told him that we would have blankets and food and water just as soon as possible. And he looked at me, and said, “Ma’am, that is so kind. But we are all meeting here to carpool to the dove blind. Today is September 1, the first day of dove hunting season!”

I had thought that they were refugees fleeing the horrors of hurricane Katrina, but that was not the case! And then, in the news this week, we saw horrific images of children fleeing the horrors of Syria. The father of the toddler, Aylan Kurdi, who drowned said, “there was no other hope.”[[1]](#footnote-2) He said that they see no end to the war there and that life is hopeless.[[2]](#footnote-3) That brutal civil war in Syria has been going on for 5 years. Bill Holston is a member of Greenland Hills and he is also the Executive Director of the Human Rights Initiative of North Texas working with refugees and immigrants who have suffered human rights abuses, and he said on facebook this week, “our clients don't come to have a better life. They come to save their life. Aren't we better than a people that slams the door?” Thousands are risking their lives to reach safety on Europe’s shores.

I was talking with one of my relatives this week and they were expressing frustration wondering why “those people” couldn’t just go back home. Why were they blocking the Chunnel at Calais into England? I said it reminded me of the people fleeing the violence in Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador. They would ride on the roof of the freight trains north through Mexico. But the railways in the Chunnel have electrified wires. They were doing whatever they could to survive. And then I said to my relative, “Didn’t Jesus say, “I was a stranger and you welcomed me in” (Matthew 25:35)? And my relative quickly changed the subject.

We talked last week about healing our intentions. Jesus loved and he showed us how to hold all people in our heart. We are called to especially look for those people that nobody else seems to be loving. And we know that God brings us renewal and redemption and God can help heal our intentions when our intentions are not kind and loving. We are all connected. And when I condemn someone, I condemn myself from the inside out.

This week we talk about healing our inhibitions. In our scripture we have two stories about people who speak up. We have the Syrophoenician woman who argues with Jesus and helps Jesus see that his ministry is for everyone. Jesus tells her that his ministry of healing is just for the Jews, but she fights for her daughter and helps Jesus to see that he has come for Jews and Gentiles, those who are not Jews. Jesus has come for everyone. It is a story that might ruffle your feathers. One of the commentaries I read this week says that in this story we find that Jesus is racist. He does call the Gentile Syrophoenician woman and her daughter “dogs”. I don’t like how he treats the Syrophoenician woman, but I am so glad that she stands up for herself and for her daughter and asserts their needs. She is healed of her inhibitions. And she teaches us about the power of the stranger, the power of people who are different from us because they “stretch our perspective and teach us things about themselves, about the world, and about us. But only if we will listen”.[[3]](#footnote-4)

The next story is the healing of a man who was deaf. Others spoke up for him and it is the deaf man’s friends who beg Jesus to lay hands on him and help him. “Be opened,” Jesus said, and the man who was deaf was able to speak plainly. And Jesus tells everyone to stay silent, but the people can’t. They have to proclaim this good news from the mountaintops because their friend has been healed.

I love these stories. I love the gutsy Syrophoenician woman who stands up for herself and for her daughter. I love the friends of the deaf man who are going to care for him and do whatever they can to help him. I love that Jesus tells them to be quiet about it and that they are physically unable to do that.

What are the things that we are closed off to? Are there things about which we stay silent? Shutting things out or holding things in can both be dangerous to our health. Healing can mean the freedom to face difficult things. And Jesus says to us, “be opened!”

Father Daniel Berrigan is a Catholic Priest who for decades had protested war and nuclear weapons. He worked with people with AIDS during the 1980s at St. Vincent’s Hospital in New York City. He wrote a book about that experience, *Sorrow Built a Bridge: Friendship and AIDS* where he says these words about our vocation, our calling, to persist. “Of this I am certain: of our calling to holiness, our vocation to persist, in season and out in the work of healing others, even as we seek healing for ourselves… So we take heart. We commend the woman who quite simply, with all her heart, on behalf of someone she loved, refused to give up (the Syrophoenician woman). We might think of her act as a ‘forgiving persistence’ toward Christ. We might also wish to ponder a kind of ‘persistent forgiveness’ toward the church. The woman refuses and persists. And so prevails. And so must we. And so shall we. We must forgive, deepen our love, persist in our conviction that even the church can be redeemed from sin. In so fulfilling our vocation, we ourselves are healed.”[[4]](#footnote-5)

May our eyes open to the hurts of our neighbors and the needs of those pushed to the margins in our communities. May our minds open to the perspectives of those who are not like us. May our mouths open to speak out against injustice in the world that harms and oppresses our neighbors. May our mouths cry out with joy the good news of Jesus Christ to the world. May our hearts be open that love would enter in and guide all that we do with our bodies. May our lives, opened to love, open the world around us to the unbelievable reality of God’s kingdom on earth. Open us, O God! Amen.[[5]](#footnote-6)

1. http://www.npr.org/2015/09/04/437597010/for-family-of-drowned-syrian-boy-there-was-no-other-hope-uncle-says?utm\_source=facebook.com&utm\_medium=social&utm\_campaign=npr&utm\_term=nprnews&utm\_content=20150904 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. http://www.npr.org/2015/09/04/437597010/for-family-of-drowned-syrian-boy-there-was-no-other-hope-uncle-says?utm\_source=facebook.com&utm\_medium=social&utm\_campaign=npr&utm\_term=nprnews&utm\_content=20150904 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. http://www.davidlose.net/2015/08/pentecost-15-b-what-the-syrophoenician-woman-teaches/ [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Daniel Berrigan, *Sorrow Built a Bridge: Friendship and AIDS*. (Baltimore: Fortkamp, 1989), pp. 230-231. Found in *Resources for Preaching and Worship Year B* compiled by Hannah Ward and Jennifer Wild. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. http://sacramentaleffort.blogspot.com/2015/09/ephphatha-open-up-call-to-worship-for.html [↑](#footnote-ref-6)