

NEXT STEP: STUDY & SHARE

READINGS

Isaiah 35:4-7a

Psalm 146

I will praise the Lord as long as I live. (v2)

James 2:1-17

Mark 7:24-37

PRAYER OF THE DAY

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

SERMON TEXT- Mark 7:24-37

²⁴[Jesus] set out & went away to the region of Tyre. He entered a house & did not want anyone to know he was there. Yet he could not escape notice, ²⁵but a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately heard about him, & she came & bowed down at his feet. ²⁶Now the woman was a Gentile, of Syrophenician origin. She begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. ²⁷He said to her, "Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food & throw it to the dogs." ²⁸But she answered him, "Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." ²⁹Then he said to her, "For saying that, you may go—the demon has left your daughter." ³⁰So she went home, found the child lying on the bed, & the demon gone. ³¹Then he returned from the region of Tyre, & went by way of Sidon towards the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis. ³²They brought to him a deaf man who had an impediment in his speech; & they begged him to lay his hand on him. ³³He took him aside in private, away from the crowd, & put his fingers into his ears, & he spat & touched his tongue. ³⁴Then looking up to heaven, he sighed & said to him, "Ephphatha," that is, "Be opened." ³⁵And immediately his ears were opened, his tongue was released, & he spoke plainly. ³⁶Then Jesus ordered them to tell no one; but the more he ordered them, the more zealously they proclaimed it. ³⁷They were astounded beyond measure, saying, "He has done everything well; he even makes the deaf to hear & the mute to speak."

LISTENING TO . . .

GOD- *Christian life is rooted in the Father, Son, & Holy Spirit*

1. The Gentile woman & man are of a similar type: sociologically she has no voice to be heard; medically he cannot hear or use his voice. How do they connect to *Isaiah 35:4-7a*? What are we hearing about Jesus' kingdom (*cf. 1:14-15*)? See *Luke 4:10-22; Romans 10:12; 1 Corinthians 12:13; Galatians 3:28; Colossians 3:11*
2. St. James exposes our greedy, covetous hearts (*James 2:4*) in attending to others. Jesus subverts all this in the gospel lesson (*cf. 7:20-23*). How do the woman & the man illustrate what St. James writes in *James 2:5*? See *Matthew 5:1-12, 25:31-46; Romans 6:3-4*

EACH OTHER- *Sharing & growing with our brothers & sisters in Christ*

3. Compare this story with *Mark 2:3-5, 5:22-45, 6:56*. For whom are you interceding with God? Make a list of 3-5 specific persons for whom you are praying & specifically what you are praying for. How will you know the outcome? Keep track of the progress on your list.
4. Are your prayers for real possibilities or wishful imagining? Will the desired outcome benefit the person best or your & your sense of importance? How can you adjust your intercessions appropriately?

NEIGHBORS- *Bearing fruit for those not yet our brothers & sisters*

5. Those around Jesus in the Bible are often put off or threatened by the outsiders different from themselves (*cf. Matthew 11:16-19*). St. James sternly warns us against this (*James 2:1-13*). Spend time in prayer each day this week asking the Holy Spirit to reveal the small & narrow places in your "comfort zone". Ask him to bring you to repentance & to open (v34) your zone.
6. Notice how deeply humanizing Jesus' two interactions are. In what ways is your congregation listening to its neighbors? How is it gently touching them or "hands-on" in their lives? How can you serve to help in these ways?

Generous Crumbs

We do not presume to come to your table, O merciful Lord, trusting in our own righteousness, but in your manifold & great mercies. We are not worthy to gather up the crumbs under your table. But you are the same the Lord whose property is always to have mercy. Grant us, therefore, gracious Lord, so to eat the flesh of your dear Son Jesus Christ, & so to drink his blood, that we may evermore dwell in him & he in us. Amen.

-Notes-

KEY VERSE: And immediately his ears were opened, his tongue was released, & he spoke plainly. (v35)

-NEXT STEPS MEMORY VERSE-

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. (*Philippians 4:4*)

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