



MINISTER
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23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time
September 10, 2006

Mark 7:24-37

Teachable Moments

Intro: Our reading this morning comes from the Gospel of Mark. We hear of two healings done by Jesus, and they take place in very different ways. Just before this passage Mark tells us that Jesus can not perform miracles in his hometown. Now Jesus has withdrawn from the crowds and has taken a retreat into Gentile territory.

“Teachable moments” are unplanned, spontaneous times when someone suddenly makes a connection between his or her experience and a new concept or way of understanding things. They are “aha! moments” when our world opens up in a new way and we become different because we experience the world with different eyes and ears.

This morning we commissioned our Sunday School teachers. To be a good teacher is to have a gift and to have a good teacher can be a gift from God. A good teacher can make a lasting impression that changes students in significant ways. I hope each one of us can look back on our lives and point to at least one person who we are thankful for the things they taught us and the way they taught us. It may not be a grade school teacher, it may be someone

helped change us from the people we were to the people we are.

I have any number of teachers who I am most grateful for. I'd like to share a story about one teacher who taught me a different classroom. (Lift up glider – no I'm not going to throw it today) A few summers ago I was learning how to fly sailplanes. Once when I was thirty miles out from the airport on a cross country flight, I was on a long straight glide it was going to take 20 or 30 minutes to get back to the airport. A thirty mile final approach. I could see where we were headed. A voice from the back seat said “Dan, what do you think about how this looks? I said “looks good to me”, and went back to enjoying the view. He said “look at your yaw string, it is off. If you keep flying like this you'll miss it by a mile. We won't make the field. You have to change something.” One mile off on a

thirty mile run, that shouldn't be so bad? But in a glider you don't get a second chance at a landing. Flying straight matters, I looked at the tiny yaw string, and indeed it was just a little bit off, but it was just enough off that if he hadn't intervened, and I had not made that change in direction, I would have had a very different sermon illustration. It was for me a very teachable moment.

Teachable moments, those times when we see, or hear or experience things that change the way we are. The right teacher can make a lifetime of difference. That is what is happening in our story today. The hard thing for us to grasp is that Jesus had teachers too. He learned from his parents and the rabbis, and in our story today he is learning from a strange woman from a strange land.

The woman probably didn't see her self as a teacher. I bet she didn't get up that day and say I'm going to teach that Jesus a lesson. But she did. She is hoping for something in her life and her daughter's life to change, she dares to believe that she can transform her situation by reaching out to Jesus and demanding help. Her story, this exchange between Jesus and the woman is a powerful demonstration of words that make a difference. She is in need, hungry for a cure for her daughter and she is on a mission. She will not give up until she is satisfied.

Now Jesus is out of his usual territory, he is on a retreat, trying to get away from it all; the crowds have perhaps worn him out. But

word about him is following him wherever he goes. This woman has heard about him and believes that he is indeed the messiah, someone who could help. But would he help? She was not a Jewish woman. She knew that she had no claim to him as the Savior of Israel, but still she approaches him and engages him in a real discussion of ministry and mission. This particular passage shows to us a very human Jesus. A Jesus who is doesn't do everything right the first time, one who needs to learn, one who is willing to learn, one who can recognize change and growth in himself. His sense of self changed over time and this confrontation with a foreign woman caused him to grow in incredible ways. He knows he is different because of her words after meeting this woman. And her life is different as well, she receives the healing she longs for her daughter.

This particular story has always been one that many would just as soon skip over because, at first blush, it makes Jesus come off like some insensitive jerk. This exchange shows us a Jesus who is not all-welcoming; all love, with time for everyone who comes by. Here we see a Jesus who is tired and wanting to be left alone. But work comes and finds him. This unnamed woman comes and begs him to cure her daughter. At first Jesus ignores her, but she persists, chasing after the life she knows he can give. The disciples are getting more and more annoyed with her, saying master make her go away, she keeps barking at us. Jesus stops to speak with her. And we don't know just what tone of voice he said it, but he says, I cant - it is not right to take the food

from the children and give it to the dogs. That's a rude thing that typical Jews might say in this day.

This does not daunt the woman, she takes his phrase and turns it, saying yes, but the dogs even eat of the crumbs. She didn't run away from Jesus' put down, instead she persisted saying all she wanted was a crumb. That would have been enough. She just wanted a little morsel of the greatness she saw in him. Just enough to help me she pleads. Give your healing word for my daughter. And Jesus knows she has him. He thought he has sent just for the people of Israel, but his calling was more.

There was healing that needed to be giving to given to all. Israel may have been the chosen people for God to express Gods love for the world but there were people, real people, right there in front of Jesus who may not have been of the house of Israel, but who needed to be healed just as much. So Jesus says, because of your words, your daughter is healed. It is not because of her faith, or her actions, but her words. She taught Jesus a lesson. He needed to lift his eyes higher, to grasp the fuller meaning of his ministry on earth. She came asking for crumbs for herself, instead Jesus gives her a loaf that will feed the world. Her request is granted, her daughter is made well, but Jesus is now fundamentally changed.

The deaf and mute man was healed in an entirely different way. The process involved close contact. This is not a healing from afar, with just a word from Jesus. It involves touch and pretty unusual contact as

well. Spit, fingers in the ears and all that. Kinda messy if you ask me. But it shows how Jesus is willing to be involved in making changes in lives, sometimes that change comes with rolling up sleeves and doing things we'd rather not do, but it is part of what needs to be done- if lasting change is going to take place.

The change for this man was amazing. Now he is able to speak and to hear, that is the gift given to the man who was trapped within a world where he does neither. The core of one person is expressed and shared with another, not by seeing, or feeling or thinking. It is through speaking and hearing that we come to know one another and to love one another. The deepest realities of the human heart are expressed when one speaks and another hears. Jesus comes to him and says, "be opened". It is a liberating command, not coercive. He is now free to become someone new, someone whole. As Jesus has just been opened himself to a world that was fuller and richer and more wonderful than he first imagined. There was more for him to do.

As a church, as a community of faith, we are beginning a new season of worship. Do we gather, and act expecting something to happen? Do we believe that through God's word we will be opened to new things, and set free to become more than we had figured was our lot? As we risk becoming more, are we willing to get into messy situations, whatever they may be, in order to help bring wholeness to others and ourselves. That is what it is to be the body of Christ in the world. To continually expect that more

good can happen, and that we each have a role to play, a gift to give. Are connections we can help others make and there things we might yet learn? May God open us to those possibilities. Amen