

This morning we have the MOST AMAZING GOOD NEWS!

Not only is this a healing story, someone seeks Jesus out to heal her daughter; at the same time, we Witness how her argument challenges GOD's assumptions/Jesus' assumptions/even our own! of whether WE/all humanity are SINNERS? or Recognizing that The LORD GOD is Maker of Us All, whether receiving GOD'S GRACE each person might choose to believe and have everlasting life?

Throughout the History of the World, GOD has been GOD and we have been part of GOD's Creation. As old as the Mountains and the Oceans, The LORD GOD has been our Creator Redeemer and Judge.

Throughout the History of Humanity all the way back to Adam and Eve, GOD created us to be GOD's companions, yet generation after generation, people turned away from GOD, people sinned: Cain killed Abel; all humanity became so wicked GOD attempted to start over with Noah, yet when Noah's ordeal was over the first thing he did was to get drunk. Personally, I want to give Noah a little bit of leeway, because spending every hour for 40 days and 40 nights on a boat with his family and all the different animals of the world, might push anyone's limits. People then decided for themselves to not follow GOD, but to build a Tower to their greatness, a Tower reaching up to Heaven. GOD not only confused their efforts by giving each tribe a different language, GOD also started again by choosing one person, one man Abram and his descendants to be an ELECT and faithful people through whom to reach all the world. BUT SIN continued, making this people into slaves of Egypt, eventually their being set free to become the greatest most powerful nation on the face of the earth, and Still they sinned the greater half being dispersed to the four corners of the earth, the smaller exiled.

Yet, this unnamed woman, not one of the elect, Not a descendant of Abram, claims a humble relationship. She does not claim EQUALITY WITH GOD, not even equality with GOD's CHOSEN people, SHE identifies with the DOG, the beast under the table that is content to have scraps dropped by the children.

In our family, before trying to raise children we practiced on a dog, a loveable Beagle named Rosie. Who when the children came along became their Nanny, alerting us to their fussing before they ever cried. We never fed Rosie from the table, but as an infant in his high chair, our eldest could put Rosie into a full Beg. We visited our parents each summer, and when the children, who are now 36 and 38, were quite small, we went to a very exclusive restaurant. The children behaved incredibly well for 1 and 3 years, but after the meal the 3 year old looked down at the carpeted floor beneath his chair, and commented "What this place needs is a dog to clean up!"

Getting back to the point of the story, the Gospel is quite clear this healing had not been Jesus' intent. He had gone in to sit down unnoticed, yet this woman recognized him, sought him out to make a request. Although of a different race and culture, she knew GOD to be LORD, she trusted JESUS to be the way to GOD, so she stated her faith. Two thousand years later, we may say "Well, of course she would," but in that culture and time, only Abraham, Moses and Amos had ever Stood up trying to Change GOD's Mind. Suddenly for Jesus, everything that was foretold has been fulfilled: GOD has done a miraculous new thing! A virgin conceived whose Child would be known as Mighty Counselor, Prince of Peace. The Desert Blooms! The Lion and Lamb lay down together. She has chosen to be a COMPANION WITH GOD.

Now this is only one person, the idea needs to sprout and grow, but GOD'S HOPE has been realized!

Judy and I had a wonderful vacation, thank you for that opportunity, we got to spend time with cousins and our adult children and Judy's Sister's family, to play lots of cards, swim and read, and at 66 I had the chance to waterski again, just like a kid at age 9.

On the trip home, we were buckled into our seats on the plane, when the passenger next to Judy leaned across her to say: "I know you said you are on vacation, but as a Pastor, I need to ask you a question?"

I tried to give her the scowl I imagined Jesus had given this Syrian-Phoenician woman, as she also went ahead. "I was married at age 18 and for 30 years have been abused by my husband. Emotionally and physically, as he ran around with others. So now that my kids have left the nest, I am getting a divorce. Does that make me a bad person? I mean, would God want me to stay in that relationship." Without hesitation, the words just poured out: "Of course God would not want you to be continually abused. You were faithful for 30 years, you have raised your children. I know that you are LOVED BY GOD." The woman sat back in her seat saying I grew up Catholic where all we ever heard was that we had to stay together no matter what... You actually heard me."

The Gospel writer of Mark did an amazing thing, by placing this healing story after the story of the Mother. How many times in life today are we told to "be closed off": CHOOSE THIS SIDE REJECT THAT ONE; the hate of a 14 year old to shoot two teachers and two other students; the hate when hostage-kidnappers have been found that before giving up they kill their prisoners; the refusal of people to listen to one another, to talk together. Trying to hear Confronted with a man, who throughout his lifetime was unable to speak or hear; Jesus first touched the man's Ears, allowing him to hear, then to do the same to his tongue. This seems redundant to us, because we know of course you have to be able to hear clearly in order to be able to speak clearly, but in the ancient world that was unknown. After touching the man's ears, Jesus take hold of the man's tongue and spoke a one word prayer: "Ephphatha" Be Open! Rather than being Closed. Rather than ignoring the reality of the other's needs, of their humanity, rather than being closed from companionship Jesus gave a bit of his essence, he touched the man, and invited him to be OPEN.

My grandmother used to quote a Nursery Rhyme "The wise old Owl sat in an Oak, the more he sat the less he spoke, the less he spoke, the more he heard, why can't more of us be like that bird!"

Perhaps in a world of MIRACLES, All-powerful GOD could have changed humanity, in an instant such that at some time in the Old Testament there would have been at least one person, if not a whole new generation without SIN.

But the beauty of our Faith is that we were told at Christmas that GOD was doing a new thing, GOD was entering into this life as one of us, one with us, and that that would change the world...

According to Mark it took until the 7<sup>th</sup> Chapter for this stranger, this woman (and I say that because in her culture women never ever approach a strange man to speak with him) to challenge the heart of Jesus, that we (ALL HUMANITY) could be Companions for GOD.

The reality of whether we choose to be OPEN or NOT is up to us. And the incredible part, is if we make mistakes, when we fail, GOD continues to offer for us GRACE to try again, for THE LORD IS MAKER OF US ALL.