

Scripture:
Mark 7:24-37

“Be opened.”

Last week in the first half of Mark chapter 7 we saw that it was often difficult for the religious leaders to accept that Jesus was doing things differently --- breaking with certain customs --- and practices.

Specifically not necessarily sticking to the tradition of the elders --- instead seeking to follow God’s will even when it seemed to go against certain long held teachings ---- and ways of understanding things.

And in a certain sense the very same struggle continues on in our passage for today ---- Jesus does things differently.

A Greek woman ---- born in Syrian Phoenicia seeks Jesus’ help.

Her daughter is ill and she goes to Jesus for healing.

And after a rather obtuse exchange --- Jesus grants her daughter health ---- release from the demon that had consumed her.

After having asked for help Jesus replies to the woman --- saying in verse 27 --- “First let the children eat all they want --- for it is not right to take from the children’s bread and toss it to the dogs.”

And then the woman replies in verse 28 --- saying --- “Lord ---- even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.”

To which Jesus responds ---- “For such a reply --- you may go ----- the demon has left your daughter.”

Strange words --- a bit confusing even --- “Lord ---- even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.” ---- is what secures the healing for this woman’s daughter.

What does this mean? ----- “Lord ---- even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.” --- and why would this lead to healing?

When Jesus says ----- “First let the children eat all they want --- for it is not right to take from the children’s bread and toss it to the dogs.” ----- suggests there is a pecking order as to who gets fed first.

Humans first ----- animals second ----- makes sense --- I think we can all agree with this.

But why say this to the woman? ----- isn’t it obvious ----- on a literal level ----- so what does it mean.

Is Jesus saying ----- “First I must feed my disciples then I’ll get to your needs?”

Is Jesus saying --- “First I must feed Israel --- my people --- God’s chosen people ----- then I will get to the needs of other people like you ----- a Syrophenician ----- foreign woman?”

Jesus says --- “First let the children eat all they want --- for it is not right to take from the children’s bread and toss it to the dogs.”

The woman replies --- “Lord ----- even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.”

And the girl is healed.

Strange kind of exchange --- talking about food and dogs ----- and who gets fed first and who the crumbs fall to.

What could it mean?

Well ----- part of what this means is that there is enough for everyone.

It’s not by mistake that right after our passage today Jesus feeds another huge crowd that had been with Him following Him for days.

There is enough for everyone --- there is always enough for everyone.

Just prior to our passage today --- we heard about it last week --- it was all about what foods are clean and what foods are unclean.

Here today --- in the first part of our passage it's all about what people are clean ---- and worthy --- and what people are unclean --- and unworthy.

Last week Jesus said ----- "All food is clean." --- verse 19 Mark 7.

Today Jesus is essentially saying --- "All people are clean --- all people are worthy." ---- even the ones we may think of as dogs.

It was difficult for the early church to come to terms with the reality that Jesus wasn't just for Jews ---- Israel --- God's chosen people ----- and that He was ---- and still is ----- for all people.

It was difficult for the early church to realize that no one is outside of God's invitation to grace --- everyone is welcome at the table.

In the second half of our passage today Jesus heals a deaf and dumb man.

And as He does He says to Him in Aramaic ---- "Eff ---- Fatha" ----- or ----- "Be opened."

"Be ---- opened."

That's the heart of our passage today ---- Jesus declaring ---- "Be ---- opened."

The religious leaders were closed.

Closed about what food was clean what was unclean --- what rules to follow --- how to follow them --- and in what order --- among other things.

Their minds were closed --- they thought they knew best.

The Christ is for Israel only --- for Jews only --- God's chosen people --- and not necessarily also Gentiles ---- Greeks and Syrophoenicians --- like the woman in Mark's gospel today.

Their minds were closed --- they though they knew best.

In a sense the deaf and mute man represents all that was wrong with how Jesus was being accepted and perceived.

People weren't hearing Him right ----- they were kind of like a deaf man ----
 -- they weren't speaking about Him as He truly was --- mute --- or at least
 corrupted like the man in the gospel today.

Everything was misunderstood and was being corrupted in transmission.

So Jesus corrects things.

Be opened ---- He says to the deaf and dumb man --- or almost dumb man --
 -- he could "hardly talk" verse 32 says.

"Be opened."

"Be opened" ----- is a whole lot different from just --- "be open."

"Be open" ----- is advice or counsel --- a recommendation.

Good advice --- good counsel --- good recommendation.

But it isn't the same as --- "Be opened."

"Be opened" ---- is a command --- a proclamation ---- it's a deed done --- a
 miracle even.

Jesus doesn't say to the man ---- be open --- as if offering advice to be open
 and receptive.

Instead He says ---- "Be opened" ----- a command --- "you are now opened
 and have received."

There's a subtle ---- but powerful difference here.

"Be open" ---- mere advice.

"Be opened." ---- a command ----- a deed done.

One is something we can do ourselves.

The other is something that can only be done for us.

We can work on being open --- having an open mind --- inquisitive disposition ---- ready and prepared and eager to receive new information --- divine revelation.

But only God can truly open us up.

We can be open --- but only God can cause us to be opened.

The man couldn't will Himself to hearing and speaking --- only God could do this.

Being ready to be opened means to be prepared for Jesus to come to us --- discover what is holding us back ---- hindering us from breaking forth and living into the grace of God ---- and say --- "Be opened my child."

Perhaps some of us have seen the video that has made its way around Facebook and e-mails again recently.

It's about a child who finally receives the gift of hearing --- and as the child is about to hear his mother's voice for the very first time camera's are focused in on the child ---- and we witness the child shocked into hearing for the very first time --- looking all about with delight.

And what a delight it is --- for the child to finally hear the voice of its mother.

A whole new world has opened up.

That's what happened here ---- that's what the gospel does to us.

I remember when I first got glasses --- I was 18 --- getting head aches all the time from reading.

So I went to the eye doctor -- I still remember when my first pair of glasses were placed on my face ---- I looked out of the shop and into Limeridge Mall in Hamilton and I could read all of the shop signs without squinting --- it was a like a revelation ---- I can see I can see.

Be opened.

That's the kind of miraculous opening up that Jesus is talking about in Mark's gospel today ---- hearing for the very first time --- seeing for the very first time.

Something done to you ---- seeing and hearing and not just with your ears and eyes --- but with our heart and mind ---- like never before --- thanks to God.

The gospel opens us up ----- we are opened by the gospel --- in ways we never thought possible.

The deaf and mute man knew no other --- until Jesus came along and opened Him up.

It wasn't something he could do himself ---- it wasn't a short coming of his.

The man simply couldn't do certain things without Jesus coming along and performing a miracle --- restoring his hearing and his ability to speak.

And it's the same for us.

Yes we can be open to the gospel --- yes we can be **open** to new things --- God speaking to us.

But then there is being **opened** by the gospel.

Then there is being **opened** ----- not just open --- but opened ---- as God speaks to us.

God's reign ----- God's Word --- the truth of the gospel ----- has been cut loose in Jesus Christ ---- that's the message of the gospel today --- that's what Mark is driving home with the Syrophenician woman ----- and deaf and dumb man.

The deaf hear --- the dumb speak.

The blind see.

The possessed are released --- sick healed.

Gentiles --- Syrophenicians ----- everyone receives restoration and salvation ----- not just some few chosen ones --- Pharisees ----- religious leaders ---- teachers of the law ---- and so on ---- but everyone.

No one is outside of God's invitation to grace --- that's the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ today.

No one is outside of God's invitation to grace.

Unfortunately we've too often lost the great sense of excitement and relief and celebration that is God's invitation to grace.

When your child --- or someone close to you ---- a loved one ---- is healed -- -- it's cause for great celebration.

When someone deaf hears --- when someone who can hardly speak ---- spits out sentence after sentence effortlessly ----- its hallelujah.

When the gospel takes root ---- when we are opened up by God ---- it's hallelujah.

Cause for celebration --- and then some.

Every day is an opportunity to be opened by the gospel --- by the grace of God in the person of Jesus Christ.

God is forever opening things up ---- and revealing His loving -- saving nature.

Sometimes it's in the less than obvious --- less than likely places ---- less than likely people.

The early church suffered from a deep sense of insularity ---- they were inward looking to a fault.

The thought grace only applied in certain circumstances --- circumstances that they could control ---- and predict --- and understand.

Jesus comes along and blasts this idea to pieces.

Helping and healing whoever He wanted --- and not just the ones they expected --- and thought worthy and good.

The gospel was cut loose.

God's invitation to grace was for everyone.

People were being opened who they never thought would ever in a million years be opened.

Something was happening that was out of control.

Out of their control.

So it is ----- still today.

God's grace is out of control.

It is out of our control.

And it's beautiful thing.

"Be opened." ---- Jesus said and the man was.

"Be opened" ----- Jesus is still saying today --- and people are.

People are being opened in ways far beyond our imagination --- and it's a beautiful thing.

We can be open ----- which is a good -- and faithful --- and necessary part of our walk in faith.

But only God can say to us --- "Be opened."

Be opened Jesus said ---- and the man was.

May it be so with us as it was with this man.

No one is outside of God's invitation to grace.

We are all agents of --- and recipients of His divine grace --- favour ---
mercy and salvation.

Thanks to Jesus Christ.

Be opened.

Amen.