

Sermon Notes – September 8, 2024
The Holy Gospel of St. Mark 7: 24-37
Peace Lutheran Church
“We Are All in the Boat Together”

Our readings remind us of how God's salvation often takes shape through experiences of renewal, healing, equality, acceptance, and restoration.

An excerpt from an oracle that probably originated during Israel's exile (Isa. 35:1-10), our first reading promises God's intervention. The oracle used healing and re-hydration imagery to reflect the character of God's salvation, which is bestowed not just upon humanity but upon all of creation. Christians see Jesus' ministry reflecting many of these traits, especially this Sunday as “the ears of the deaf [are] unstopped and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy” (Isa. 35: 5, 6, Mark 7: 37).

James questions a faith that has no bearing on how one lives. The most pressing issue is favoritism. In a society where honoring social superiors was conventional, James challenges partiality as contrary to the gospel. Latin American liberation theologians find James an ally in advocating that God has “chosen the poor in the world” (2: 5). While some disregard James as antithetical to grace, impoverished and minoritized peoples appreciate his message. Martin Luther concurred that true faith is not without effect, but is a living, busy, active, mighty thing. It is impossible for it, faith, not to be doing good works incessantly.

Our gospel reading is the start of Jesus' ministry among Gentiles in Mark's narrative (7: 24-8: 10). Throughout Mark, women (such as the Syrophenician - the Gentile woman - who appears to best Jesus in a brief discourse) outshine men in faithfully responding. Precisely why Jesus appears to initially respond so callously, yet later so generously, is uncertain. Perhaps He sought to test the woman so as to elicit her faith. A more straightforward reading is that in His humanness, Jesus underestimated the breadth of divine generosity, where He is invited to a fuller understanding by her faithful request. Regardless, Jesus answers her plea - the only healing from a distance in the gospel of Mark - and effectively affirms her faith. The story demonstrates prayer's effectiveness. Jesus' power is in the transformative learning that arises from engaging

others in need and the wisdom of listening to those who are on the edge. Jesus might not have been as quick to heal in the second healing story were it not for the preceding interaction. His use of touch and spittle (7: 33-34) is common for ancient healing practices. Defying Jesus' request, the crowds spread word about Him, showing how excited people were at his healing powers.

Our readings invite us to a faith that is not “dead,” but rather it engages us in sharing with others our experiences of God's saving power in Christ. When we realize that we are all in this boat together, we are truly inclined to journey together!