

Sermon for 9.9.18

Last week we heard from Rev'd Judy that the connecting thread in the readings was to do with matters of the heart.

In many ways this thread continues in our readings to day. In the reading from Isaiah, the fearful heart receives hope as the prophet anticipates a great move home by those who have lost their way. There will be terrible recompense for their lack of justice, mercy, compassion and neighbourliness but with reorganisation and repentance, salvation is on the way for people and for the creation.

The eyes of the blind shall be opened, the ears of the deaf unstopped and the lame shall leap like a deer.... Waters shall break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert...and the grass shall become reeds and rushes.

Today's psalm sings out heart felt praises for God as the great creator who made heaven and earth **and** the compassionate saviour who gives justice to those that suffer wrong and bread to those who hunger.

The epistle from James in which the writer warns about partiality e.g. people with fine cloths getting the best seats while those who have little or nothing are shoved into a corner somewhere- is actually a heartfelt plea for people to express the unity of faith and deeds.

Theologian Thomas Leahy, writes that pure and undefiled qualities of holiness are expressed in the unity of external works of charity and inner integrity.¹

They are one – unified and wholesome. When they are separated both are dead.

In the gospel we hear that wonderful story of the encounter between Jesus and the Syrophenesian woman and the healing of the deaf mute. Jesus has gone into gentile territory to the Greek region of Tyre possibly to find quiet and seclusion.

However the peace and seclusion that he seeks is not to be, for even on gentile soil he could not escape notice. A Greek mother, who had heard about him seeks him out and when she finds him, she bows down at his feet in order to intercede for her demon possessed daughter.

Jesus responds to her plea by telling her that the children, that is, the Jewish people of God, had to be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs.

Her reply is "Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs"

Theologian Herman Waetjen suggests that Jesus proverb of satisfying the needs of the children first, does not exclude the Greek woman and her daughter, but that Jesus words point to the fact that they, the gentiles, will have to wait their turn.²

But the woman cannot wait her turn - she needs Jesus and his miraculous healing now.

Her request for a miracle is nevertheless outside the good news that he has brought for his people before all others.

Historically speaking, the promises of God's coming kingdom were first communicated to the Jewish people and they have been waiting for their fulfilment for a long time.

¹ Thomas W. Leahy, S.J. The Epistle of James in *The New Jerome biblical Commentary*, Edited by Raymond E. Brown and Joseph A. Fitzmyer. Geoffrey Chapman: London 1994. P911-912.

² Herman C. Waetjen. *A Reordering of Power: A Socio-Political Reading of Marks's Gospel*, Fortress Press Minneapolis, 1989. P135

The apostle Paul acknowledges this in his evangelization of the gentiles.

Now bearing this in mind, in this context the request from the woman is as a crumb fallen from the table.

Theologian Morna Hooker writes, that through her reply to Jesus, the woman acknowledges that Israel has something that the gentiles do not have – namely, the source of nourishment; she recognises that what she requests belongs to something greater, and therefore shows some understanding concerning the kingdom itself – in other words she demonstrates true faith in Jesus as God’s grace in the world.³

And Jesus says; for this saying you may go your way; the demon has left your daughter.

The second part of our journey today through heart felt matters, takes place further into gentile country, in the region of southern Syria “the Decapolis”. The people bring to Jesus, a friend in need – a deaf man with a speech impediment. Jesus takes the man aside, away from the crowd.

In his private treatment of applying saliva to the tongue, and inserting his fingers in the ears, Jesus acts like a physician utilizing the technique of healing that seems to have been common and widespread among these people.

Then he does something that goes beyond the normal way of the physician – he looks up to heaven, he sighs and says to the deaf man, “Ephphatha”, that is “Be opened.” And immediately the gentile could hear and speak.

Jesus’ sigh indicates, Waetjen suggests, that Jesus is overcome with distress at the gentile predicament of defective hearing and speaking and therefore a deficiency of genuine communication, which isolates them one from another and who are represented by this deaf-mute.⁴

For some theologians this story of the healing of the deaf mute is understood to be a metaphor for the opening of the heavens to all gentiles.

These two beautiful stories in the gospel today speak to us about how we live in the assured hope of the kingdom of God on earth in Christ. How he is with us in our suffering and in our joy. In our heart- felt recognition and acceptance of this, we know in faith that in the kingdoms fulfilment - the eyes of the blind shall be opened, the ears of the deaf unstopped and the lame shall leap like a deer.... Waters shall break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert...and the grass shall become reeds and rushes.

Or as Julian of Norwich puts it – all shall be well and all manner of things shall be well.

The Lord be with you.

³ Morna D. Hooker, *The Message of Mark*, Epworth Press: London, 1993. P41.

⁴ Herman C. Waetjen. *A Reordering of Power: A Socio-Political Reading of Marks’s Gospel*, Fortress Press Minneapolis, 1989. P137.