

I don't know why but for a long time I never thought of Jesus getting tired. Silly of me I suppose, but I thought of him, in the brief time his ministry was going to last, going full tilt until the end. Stopping to pray, of course. But not going away, taking a break, not wanting anyone to know he was there. But now I get it. Sometimes a person just needs a break.

In walked a Gentile, a Syrophoenician woman who bowed at his feet. Right away we know that this might not end well. Jews and Syrophoenicians had bad blood going way back. She told Jesus about her beloved daughter and how she had this unclean spirit inside her. Let me say something was obviously desperately wrong with her daughter. Jesus responded to her request like an exhausted person might.

Grumpy Jesus said about the nastiest thing he could to this woman. While his attacks on hypocritical religious authorities (and sometimes his own disciples) were often of this nature, Jesus was remarkably patient with the people with whom he came into contact. He said, "Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs" (Mark 7:27). Though it's possible that Jesus was pointing to and referring to a domesticated dog lying at his feet, the Hebrews found dogs in general to be utterly disgusting scavengers. So Jesus could have been saying here that a filthy, disgusting dog is more deserving of care than this woman's daughter. It's interesting to note that even the most critical of scripture scholars would agree that Jesus spoke those words since Mark included them even though they did not cast Jesus in the best light.

This story always reminds me of our Prayer of Humble Access which we use in our Book of Common Prayer Holy Communion 1662 services:

*We do not presume to come to this thy Table, O merciful Lord, trusting in our own righteousness, but in thy manifold and great mercies. We are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under thy Table. But thou art the same Lord, whose property is always to have mercy: Grant us therefore, gracious Lord, so to eat the flesh of thy dear Son Jesus Christ, and to drink his blood, that our sinful bodies may be made clean by his body, and our souls washed through his most precious blood, and that we may evermore dwell in him, and he in us. Amen.*

Spiritually this reminds us that it can be helpful to cast ourselves in the light of the Syrophoenician woman and reflect her humility in our lives.

The woman could have run away in tears. She might have had a shred of dignity left and said, "Thank you, anyway." Instead she stood her ground. Nothing, not even this rude prophet, was going to stand in the way of getting help for her beloved daughter. You recall how she responded to his name calling, "Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." In other words, I'll gladly take leftovers. In fact, she seemed to be saying with great faith, that leftovers would be enough to make her daughter whole again. And then Jesus, without touching her daughter, without laying his eyes or hands on her, and it seems, without even looking up to heaven to pray, pronounced the woman's daughter healed. And she was.

The Syrophoenician woman's story and Jesus' response reminds me to pray always and not give up hope. It reminds me of the lament psalms in the Old Testament which have the person asking why God is failing to act and then reminding God of what God's job is, all with faith that the psalmist's request will be honoured. I am also reminded that I cannot dictate what kind of healing is to take place. While I may want someone's cancer to go away, or people to work out their differences and

restore their relationship the healing that takes place may be subtler. It may be that the ones I'm praying for are handed a closer walk with God or peace. In some cases they may receive the ultimate healing of life eternal with God.

It looked like Jesus wasn't going to get much rest in Tyre and so he and his companions packed up and moved on and were, once again, joined by the crowd. On their way some people came up to Jesus and interceded for a fellow who could not speak because he was deaf and had a speech impediment. They begged Jesus to help their poor friend. Jesus took him away in private, which, I think, was a good thing, since the gestures he was going to use to heal this man were disgusting. Tough to stomach, you might say. He put his fingers in the man's ears. So far, so good. But then he spat and touched the guy's tongue. We assume that Jesus didn't just spit like an AFL player after a ball contest. He spat on his fingers before touching his tongue. Why? We'll never know but again, it is likely the action he took and not one made up by Mark. Jesus looked up to heaven. Here is the prayer that seemed to be missing in the first healing story, "Be opened." Mark included the words in Jesus' native Aramaic tongue : *Ephphatha*. It has become one of the words in Aramaic we all know. We'll never know why he chose to do that. Instantly the man was healed. The gospel reports that healed man "spoke plainly." I suspect more accurately that the man shouted, "Yahoo!"

Jesus tried to keep everyone quiet about this healing. Again, we don't know why but we can make a couple of educated guesses. Maybe he was still exhausted and was concerned that every sick person in the territory was going to rush over to be healed. Perhaps he did not want his ministry to be about healing but rather about proclaiming and bringing about the reign of God. In the end it did not matter since, despite Jesus' orders, they told the world "he has done everything well; he even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak" (Mark 7:37).

In those two stories it is a third party who asked Jesus to help. Same thing with you and me. We are often asked by people to pray for others. In our pew sheet we have nearly twenty names of people who have requested our prayers. And, I know, we all say that we will do just that. But even the most well meaning of us tend to forget over time. So here are a couple of suggestions. When we say that we will pray for someone, make sure we get his or her name. It sounds obvious but I can't tell you how many times I've been asked to pray for someone's relative and failed to get their name. I know that God knows, but I still want the prayer to be personal.

Start a prayer journal even if it's on the back of an envelope you keep on your person. If you have a smart phone or tablet you can list them and help us remember to pray and remember what we are praying for. Then set aside some time each day to remember them in prayer. Stand in the long line of those who have brought people to Jesus for help, from the Syrophenician woman to the anonymous people who brought the deaf man who was unable to speak. Pray and then let God be God. Let God decide in what form the healing will be. Amen.

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