

Sun Sept 8, 2024 CCC Mark 7:24-37 "Ready or Not"

God created the world, and created us to be like Him. As God created the world, so like him, we create our world.

Our particular body, particular parents and birth, since birth in specific places with proximity to specific people—this is what God creates. Our own history of thinking about all the people we've met and the experiences we have had—this is the world we create. Our perception of the spiritual world; whether there is a trustworthy, loving God; how trustworthy our own thoughts and feelings are; in what ways it is safe to trust other people; how deeply to get involved in communities; what to do with mistakes and malice and misunderstandings as they arise within ourselves and from others.

To put it another way, from the Scriptures, we know that God is guiding us and that God has a plan for each of us and for the world. Also from the Scriptures, we know that we choose our own way, in a positive way, building and creating with all of the resources God has given, and in a negative way, blocking and denying and fighting and fearing to use all we have been given.

Ready or not, we receive the world God created for us and create our own world in that.

The first story boldly looks at how Jesus had a life that was planned by God and also learned and grew as a man, interacting with someone who heard about him came to her on her own. Goodness! Is it all right to say that Jesus was helped by a Gentile woman to understand the mission that God gave him? The second story is the healing of the man who was brought to Jesus by others. That story makes us uncomfortable because it involves spit and Jesus' fingers in the man's ears and on his tongue and a special word. It might seem magical, but we know God doesn't do magic. So both of these stories have an edge to them.

These stories are an opportunity for us to take a few more steps toward freedom and joy, on one hand finding our God-given purpose or parallel to that, embracing our bodies and spit and identity and race and language and community and circumstances. There never will come a time when we will get beyond having to receive God's will for ourselves, and also taking responsibility for making the world that we live in. This is true as individuals, and each community or group also has these two tasks.

Taking the first story from v. 24, the woman was a Greek speaker of Phoenician race. Researchers are divided on whether the Syrian qualifier means she was a Phoenician living in Syria rather than in Carthage, or that she was from the northern part of Syria rather than the

southern, or that her parents were from different background. The research is interesting, but since it is not conclusive we come back to what anyone reading the text can hear, that she was a Greek speaking Gentile, that she and/or Jesus could use both Greek and Aramaic to communicate, that she had heard about Jesus healing, that she had a daughter around 6 or 7 years old who was disturbed, and that she loved her daughter.

Jesus turns down her plea. "It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." V.27 A commentator on this passage records what a Jewish scholar write about this. "If any other Jewish teacher of the time had said such a thing Christians would never have forgiven Judaism for it." (Klausner, Jesus, 294; quoted by Marcus, p. 468) Wow. This is hard to swallow. We know that the message of Christ was for the whole world, and many of us are Gentiles. Jesus was taking the message to the Israelite nation first. But we will learn that this woman has accepted the world as it is and is also willing to create her own world.

It seems that Jesus interacted with her and as a human learned and adjusted to her wisdom. We don't have her name, but she believed that God was loving and faithful and she was not wrong. Whether we think or know ourselves to be disqualified from God's mercy and healing because of specific things about ourselves, if we know God to be true and good, let us hold God to his lovingkindness (hesed) and not drop back. Whatever you hear about Jesus, insist on making it your own.

The path of Jesus back to Galilee is roundabout. One commentator has said that it was as if someone said they went "from Portland to Denver via Seattle and the Great Plains." (Marcus, 471) Huh? Again, there are different ways to understand this. Some say that this shows that Mark did not know the area around Palestine, that he was a Gentile from another area. Others think that Mark was writing to Christians scattered around Syria and Palestine and so makes sure to mention that Jesus passed through where they lived. Surely, if Christ had gone to New Jersey, we would proudly speak of Jesus in the Tri-State Area.

People continue to hear about Jesus and continue to connect him to the needs of people they love. A man who cannot hear and cannot speak clearly is brought to Jesus. Again, we do not know if the man could hear or speak at one time and lost those abilities or whether he was born without hearing and thus could not speak clearly. Jesus uses spit, a traditional healing salve, poking his fingers in the man's ears to clear a path and most likely spitting on his fingers and touching the man's tongue to release his speech. The Aramaic word is preserved here. Perhaps healers of Mark's day used the word, as we say, marana tha, to try to connect back to the powerful reality of Jesus's life. People were really astonished. They were blown away.

These are wonderful stories. They give us hope. We ourselves are sometimes severely disturbed and have disturbed loved ones we can't help. We ourselves and loved ones have blocked hearing and impaired speech, physically and spiritually. Could it be that the power of God could work in our lives, too? These stories are an opportunity for us to take a few more steps toward freedom and joy, on one hand finding our God-given purpose or parallel to that, embracing our bodies and identity and community and circumstances.

Everything you hear about Jesus is for you.

### **Reference**

Bratcher, Robert G. A Translator's Handbook on the Gospel of Mark.

United Bible Societies, 1961. Pp. 236-244. Helpful for understanding specific words.

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Fortress, 2007. Pp. 364-376.

Marcus, Joel. Mark 1-8. The Anchor Bible Series, Vol. 27.

Yale, 2000. Pp. 461-481. This is the commentary I found most insightful and stimulating.

Various translations of Mark's Gospel.