

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church
Quincy, IL
Rev. Martin Eden

Pentecost 16
Saturday, September 7, 2024, at 5:00 p.m.
Sunday, September 8, 2024, at 9:00 a.m.

“We Get More Than Just the Crumbs”

Mark 7:24-37

We continue our journey through Mark’s Gospel in Series B of our three-year lectionary – the reading schedule used by much of Christendom. You may remember a few weeks ago, we departed from Mark’s Gospel and spent three weeks in John 6 talking about Jesus being the Bread of Life.

Today’s readings gives us an opportunity to look at the entirety of Mark’s Gospel and the brilliance of the Holy Spirit’s organization of thought, and the brilliance (and a little bit of criticism) of the organizers of the lectionary series.

So what we see in our Gospel reading today is in direct response to what we have seen in our last two Gospel readings (also from Mark 7). Two weeks ago, Jesus criticized the Pharisees for being hypocrites for rigorously following the letter of their manmade laws, but disregarding the spirit of God’s Law. Then last week, Jesus says that it is not what goes into a person that makes him unclean (thus declaring all food to be clean). He is laying the groundwork for His ministry to the Gentiles.

The Pharisees, and even some of His own disciples we are told in John 6, reject Jesus as the Bread of Life and do not see Him as the fulfillment of God’s promise to the children of Abraham. The grace and promise found in the person

of Jesus is not just for the Jews. It is going to be given even to those who eat food that you call unclean.

The Lord says through the prophet Isaiah, “It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth” [Is. 49:6]. All of this is happening on the heels of Jesus feeding 5000 men plus the women and children with the five loaves and two fish – which we read in the previous chapter of Mark. Mark chapter 8 begins with another feeding miracle – the Feeding of the 4000. The crowd of 4000 men plus the women and children were all Gentiles.

Here is my criticism of the organizers of the lectionary. We skip over that feeding miracle – even though it is an integral part of the greater story of how Jesus came to be the Savior of the Gentiles also.

So after Jesus calls the Pharisees a bunch of hypocrites, He leaves Capernaum and goes to the region of Tyre and Sidon to the north of Israel. This is a very not-Jewish area. In fact, it is the home of Queen Jezebel, the wicked Baal worshiping wife of King Ahab in the days of Elijah.

So, if anywhere is unclean, this place is unclean. Jesus is going to the heart of the place that should absolutely reject Him. And just as Mark records at the beginning of his Gospel in chapter one, where Jesus enters the synagogue in Capernaum and casts out a demon from a Jewish man, now we have a non-Jewish woman with a very similar problem.

But unlike Jezebel who rejected God, and the Pharisees who were also rejecting God, this non-Jewish descendant of Jezebel’s people knows who Jesus

actually is. A woman whose little daughter is possessed by a demon comes to Him. She falls at His feet and begs Jesus to cast the demon out – recognizing that He is more powerful than the demon.

And Jesus gives a response that seems a little odd at first reading. “Let the children be fed first, for it is not right to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs.” But when you read the entire context, Jesus has gone to this Gentile region to get away from the crowds of Jews following Him around as He would tend to go off to a solitary place and pray from time to time.

We are told, “He entered a house and did not want anyone to know, yet He could not be hidden.” He is about to begin His ministry to the Gentiles in the region of the Decapolis east of the Sea of Galilee where the feeding of the 4000 will take place. He is essentially saying to the woman that He will finish His work with the Jews before He begins His ministry to the Gentiles. It is akin to when Mary tells Jesus to save the day at the wedding at Cana. She says to Jesus, “They have no wine.” He responds, “Woman, what does that have to do with Me? My hour has not yet come.” And then He makes over 100 gallons of the best wine.

The Syrophenician woman’s response is amazing. She basically says, “Yes, salvation does rightfully come through the children of Israel. Knowing who Yahweh is through His Word, I am well aware of that. Yet do not even the dogs, which you tell me that I am (and I acknowledge that I am) eat the crumbs that fall from the Master’s table. Don’t they eat the crumbs of the bread given to the children?”

This woman demonstrates great faith, however (I’ll offer a little bit of criticism) she has a very small understanding what it means to partake of the

Bread of Life. She imagines that only the Jews will get the full feeding of the Bread of Life and all she can hope for are the crumbs.

The reality is, Jesus is just about to go and feed the 4000 Gentiles and prove to everyone that a faithful Gentile has equal share in the Bread of Life. On His way there, a man is brought to Him who is deaf and mute. And in this healing miracle, we see a fulfillment of what, in our Old Testament reading, Isaiah said would be the sign of the Messiah having come: “the ears of the deaf unstopped . . . the tongue of the mute sing for joy.”

What we see here is a parallel in Jesus’ ministry among the Gentiles to Jesus ministry to the Jews. Mark’s Gospel begins with Jesus casting out a demon and performing healing miracles among the Jews. Then He feeds them with loaves and fishes. Jesus ministry among the Gentiles begins with Jesus casting out a demon and performing healing miracles and He feeds them with loaves and fishes.

But Jesus commands people to not tell others about the miracles because performing miracles is not the reason He came. His real mission and ministry is to be the final Lamb of sacrifice on the altar of the cross. When this is revealed, then Jesus, at the end of Mark’s Gospel, commands the disciples to “Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation.”

It is too small a thing for Jesus to only be the Savior of the Jews. As the Lord said through the prophet Isaiah, “I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth.” Amen.