



Faith takes Christ captive in his word, when he's angriest, and makes out of his cruel words a comforting inversion, as we see here. You say, the woman responds, that I am a dog. Let it be, I will gladly be a dog; now give me the consideration that you give a dog.

- Martin Luther -

Comments on Mark 7

PROCLAMATION POINTS

The following are some thoughts and questions to be used for a text study on the weekly lessons, or for jump-starting the imagination of the preacher and hearer in preparing for the proclamation event.

Isaiah 35:4-7a

When we think of the “wilderness,” images of barrenness and desolation come to mind. It is a place of danger and potential death. But it is also a place where we find new life as we learn to rely on God for all our needs, instead of relying on our own strength and might.

The message Isaiah was given from God was one of the Lord's impending glory. The wilderness would be transformed from a dry wasteland to a place of promise and renewal. The eyes of the blind will be opened and the ears of the deaf will hear again. Those who are lame will walk gracefully and those who cannot speak will find their voices. Thirst quenching waters will flow like what Israel saw when Moses struck the rock with his staff and water spilled forth (Exodus 17:1-7).

- *When Isaiah said, “Be strong; fear not!” how was he pointing to a future rejuvenation for Israel? Why do we worry when we know God has a future for us?*
- *What sorts of situations have you experienced in your life where it seemed like you were in a dry, hot desert? Did God transform that desert into an oasis of new life? If so, how?*

Psalms 146

The psalmist warned the people of the congregation not to put their trust in princes or earthly rulers. They will not always be faithful or trustworthy. Human beings cannot grant salvation. As Genesis points out, we are only dust and to dust we shall return (Genesis 3:19).

The only one we can always trust is the Creator of the heavens and earth. His mercy never fails and his plans never perish. The promises of the Great I Am are trustworthy and true. Those who put their trust in him will be blessed by our just and merciful God.

- *In what ways do we get caught putting our trust in princes and rulers of nations? How do they disappoint us or fall short? Does this trusting of earthly rulers ever border on idolatry? How?*

In our day and age, “justice” is a word that has taken on political and ideological connotations (ie. something that is to be enforced by a human agency that is responsible for distribution of societies' advantages and disadvantages). However, at its very root, the word *mishpat* in Hebrew, means “to settle,” “to decide,” or “to judge.” It is a word used in the context of the legal system.

- *How is God's justice closely related to care for the oppressed, the poor, the widow, the orphan, or the abused? In what ways did Jesus show God's mishpat to people he met?*

- *Do we deserve a righteous judgment from God? In what ways does Jesus ensure for us what we do not deserve?*

James 2:1-10, 14-18

James instructed believers to show no partiality amongst people who entered the assembly. There were not to judge a person, either favorably or unfavorably, based on their clothing, possessions, or any other thing that indicated their social status. To do so would be to dishonor God and ignore the teachings of Christ who welcomed and ate with sinners, outcasts, the poor, and the unwanted.

- *How does James envision the proper treatment of all brothers and sisters of Christ? How are we doing in this department?*

James went on to say that believers cannot live their lives as if their actions don't matter. Faith is “acted out” in our works. We are called to do good for our neighbor; if we fail to see and respond to the needs of others then we are spiritually dead inside. His point was that good works are the natural outgrowth of a life of faith.

- *How are any actions of faith a matter of the Holy Spirit living in us?*
- *In what ways have Lutherans struggled with this passage in relation to Paul's “we are justified by faith,” mantra?*

Mark 7:(24-30) 31-37

Jesus went into someone's house in the region of Tyre and Sidon in secret. He didn't want to be seen and he didn't want word to get out that he was there (see v. 7:24). His movements through the area, however, did not go unnoticed. There was one woman who had a great need. We can only imagine her waiting for the Galilean preacher to show up. Word of him spread quickly and she was ready! The unnamed woman came to Jesus and knelt at his feet. She begged him to cast a demon out of her young daughter.

- *Can you blame the woman for seeking out this man who did miracles? If you are a parent, can you imagine her distress?*

Jesus' answer to the woman is a puzzling one, “Let the children be fed first, for it is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs.” What an insult! Jesus called her and her daughter “dogs.” She would not be deterred by his apparent unwillingness to help. Instead, her cleverness caught Jesus' attention. She was asking only for the rights afforded a dog.

- *How did Jesus' words actually serve to draw out the woman's faith? Has God's “no” ever forced you to trust him more deeply?*