

He Has Done Everything Well

Mark 7:24-37

Lethbridge Mennonite Church

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From the beginning of a new school year (this Sunday) until the beginning of a new Christian year (the First Sunday of Advent), we're going to be following the lectionary track through the gospel of Mark.

There will be some Sundays where we have a special theme or a guest speaker where the Scriptures might change, but for the most part we're going to be going on little tour through parts of Mark's gospel.

We're not going to cover the whole book, but we're doing to drop in here and there and see what Jesus is up to and what this has to do with us all these years later.

A few notes about Mark generally. Mark is widely considered to be the earliest of the four gospels to be written (somewhere in the 60's or 70's AD, so only a few decades after Jesus' life).

Mark is also the shortest and most action packed of the four gospels.

There is no birth narrative (like Luke), no dense theological prologue (like John), no genealogies to establish Jesus' credentials (like Matthew and Luke).

In Mark, the first time we encounter Jesus he's getting baptized in the Jordan by John and then *immediately* he's off to the wilderness where he is tempted by the devil.

(Words like "immediately" show up a lot in Mark's gospel. In Mark, Jesus is always on the go, always racing off to the next thing.)

Today, we're dropping down today in chapter 7.

Jesus is in the region of Tyre and Sidon, modern day Lebanon, Gentile territory. He's been busy healing and teaching walking on water and feeding hungry people and driving out demons. He has just ticked off the Pharisees by calling them hypocrites.

His reputation is growing as are the crowds. People want to be where he is.

The text tells the story of two miracles. A little girl with a demon is set free and a deaf and a mute man is healed.

But I want to work backwards from the end of the text.

After people witness these healings, the text says, "They were astounded beyond measure, saying, "He has done everything well (Mark 7:37).

I want to reflect on that one statement in the brief time I have this morning.

What has Jesus done well?

Well, on the obvious level he has changed two people's lives. Two precious human beings' futures will never be the same after their encounter with Jesus.

And he has changed the lives of those who love them, the mother of the little girl, the community that surrounds the man who was deaf and mute.

He's demonstrated the power of God—who else could do such things?

He's showed what the inbreaking kingdom of God looks and feels like, the kinds of people it prioritizes, where the good news lands truest and deepest.

He has enacted the words of the prophet Isaiah:

Say to those who are of a fearful heart, "Be strong, do not fear! Here is your God. He will come with vengeance, with terrible recompense. He will come and save you." Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be opened; then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy. For waters shall break forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert; the burning sand shall become a pool and the thirsty ground springs of water (Isaiah 35:4-7).

He has brought a little bit of heaven into a world characterized by brokenness, pain, sorrow, and weariness.

This is what Jesus has done well. This is what Jesus will continue to do well, in the gospels right down to the present.

He's also done at least one thing that we might not obviously put in the category of "things Jesus does well."

He has referred to a Gentile woman as a "dog." The Jews are the "children" who get to eat the bread of the kingdom while the Gentiles (the "dogs") must remain on the outside.

Wait a minute here.

Is this not the Jesus who breaks down boundaries? The Messiah who eats with tax collectors and prostitutes? The rabbi who breaks bread with sinners? What on earth is going on?

Commentators have all kinds of ways of trying to soften the blow here. Jesus is exhausted from the crowds. Maybe even the Son of Man gets a bit cranky when he's got nothing more to give.

Some say that the Greek word seems to mean something more like "puppies" than the more derogatory connotation of "dog" which comes through in English. Perhaps Jesus is being playful.

Maybe Jesus is rehearsing well-known views of the time about Jews and Gentiles in order to test the woman or to make a point. After all, he wouldn't even *be* in Tyre and Sidon if he didn't think that Gentiles had value. Maybe he's setting the stage for the punch line.

Maybe. But the words still make us squirm. Really, Jesus? *That's* what you to say to a woman whose heart is breaking for her tormented child?

It's interesting how the woman responds. She doesn't respond in outrage or offense. She seems to accept the categories—"Jew" and "Gentile"—as they were. She simply says, "there has to be a blessing for me here, too!"

She talks back to Jesus. And Jesus blesses her for it.

He has done everything well.

I love these moments in the gospel when a little bit of heaven breaks into a world that can often feel like hell.

I even love it when it happens in weird and provocative ways.

Jesus managed to unsettle very different kinds of people and perspectives in the New Testament after all. If he's not at least occasionally unsettling us, if he behaves exactly as we think he should all the time, we might ask ourselves if we have remade Jesus in our own image.

I love it when God's priorities overwhelm our own. When the love and the mercy and the kindness and even the miracles of God show up in our sin-soaked world.

But I also know that not everyone gets their miracle.

When I chose this passage on Tuesday morning, I obviously did not know that I would be spending Friday morning with Josh and Nettie and the Entz family at the graveside of their daughter.

I have no doubt that the Entz family prayed for a miracle for Angie. Probably many times. And heaven, it seems, was silent.

I know that many of you in this room have deeply painful stories of people you love suffering in all kinds of ways. Maybe even all of us, on some level.

Now, again, we have our ways of explaining things away.

Jesus' miracles were mostly for a time and a place, they were to announce his identity, to mark the first fruits of a kingdom that we still await in its fullness.

The miracle stories are not templates or formulas that people should expect at all times and places. God doesn't work that way.

Yes, we know all this. But still, we wonder. Jesus, how about a crumb from the table? Can't you please do all things well for me, for my loved one, here and now?

I obviously cannot say why God heals some people and not others.

I can say that God apparently expects our faith, hope, and love to grow in the in-between time, between the kingdom's coming and its fulfillment, while thorns still infest the ground, while the lamb does not yet lay down with the lion, while God's will is not yet done on earth as in heaven.

I can say that the earliest Christians made their way in the world not expecting that the God they had met in Jesus Christ was a ticket to a pain-free life but expecting to suffer.

I can say that Jesus himself knows what it feels like to hear a "no" from heaven, as he did in Gethsemane.

I can say that we are allowed to talk back to Jesus, to plead, to lament, to shake our fists at heaven, to not hide our need or our desire from God (as if we could!).

But the mystery of how and why pain and sorrow seem to be so unevenly distributed remains.

I can also say, of course—indeed, I *must* say—that the end of the story has not yet come.

Not for your story or my story, not for the people we love who endure terrible things. Not for the story of the whole world.

Ultimately, the healing we all long for is eschatological in nature. It is something we wait for in faith. It is a promise whose fulfillment is still coming.

A few of us Mennonite Church Alberta pastors get together 5-6 times a year to read a book together. We gather at a nice little coffee shop in Claresholm.

We met for the first time this past week to discuss Meghan Larissa Good's new book called *Divine Gravity*. Good pastors a Mennonite church in Phoenix, AZ. She's also written a book called *The Bible Unwrapped*, which I know some of us have read.

I want to close with a passage from her new book:

Jesus' Way isn't easy or painless. But that doesn't mean that it comes without gifts. Jesus doesn't promise health. But he does promise a journey toward wholeness. He doesn't promise material wealth. But he does promise care and attention, as well as companions for the journey. He doesn't promise picket-fences. But he does promise a homecoming. Jesus doesn't promise short-run safety. But he does promise a long-run story where sacrifices are overwhelmed by gifts and no true good is permanently lost. **Jesus doesn't promise less suffering. But he does promise suffering reclaimed and recycled by God so that it is never meaningless or without its fruit.**¹

He has done everything well. He will do everything well.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.



¹ Meghan Larissa Good, *Divine Gravity: Sparking a Movement to Recover a Better Christian Story* (Harrisonburg, VA: Herald Press, 2023), 97-98.