

# Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church

Rev. Dr. Daris Bultena

September 6, 2009

23<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

Proverbs 22:1-2, 8-9, 22-23

<sup>1</sup>A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches, and favor is better than silver or gold. <sup>2</sup>The rich and the poor have this in common: the LORD is the maker of them all.

<sup>8</sup>Whoever sows injustice will reap calamity, and the rod of anger will fail. <sup>9</sup>Those who are generous are blessed, for they share their bread with the poor.

<sup>22</sup>Do not rob the poor because they are poor, or crush the afflicted at the gate; <sup>23</sup>for the LORD pleads their cause and despoils of life those who despoil them.

Mark 7:24-37

<sup>24</sup>From there he set out and went away to the region of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know he was there. Yet he could not escape notice, <sup>25</sup>but a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately heard about him, and she came and bowed down at his feet. <sup>26</sup>Now the woman was a Gentile, of Syrophenician origin. She begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. <sup>27</sup>He said to her, "Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." <sup>28</sup>But she answered him, "Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." <sup>29</sup>Then he said to her, "For saying that, you may go—the demon has left your daughter." <sup>30</sup>So she went home, found the child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.

<sup>31</sup>Then he returned from the region of Tyre, and went by way of Sidon towards the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis. <sup>32</sup>They brought to him a deaf man who had an impediment in his speech; and they begged him to lay his hand on him. <sup>33</sup>He took him aside in private, away from the crowd, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spat and touched his tongue. <sup>34</sup>Then looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, "Ephphatha," that is, "Be opened." <sup>35</sup>And immediately his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. <sup>36</sup>Then Jesus ordered them to tell no one; but the more he ordered them, the more zealously they proclaimed it. <sup>37</sup>They were astounded beyond measure, saying, "He has done everything well; he even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak."

## **“Play Clothes”**

**I read an editorial the other day that brought back a flood of memories. In those memories was a recollection of the dreaded gift shop.**

**Ah the gift shops. Museums and historical sites and art galleries all have them.**

**It is now more than 15 years ago, but the memory of the Philadelphia Museum of Art stands out clear in my memory. I took a half a dozen teenagers there on a Sunday afternoon in order to expose them to some art-work and allow them to experience the art world in ways that many never had. There were a few pieces of religious art that I really wanted the kids to look at—and not just look at but truly take in.**

**The kids cruised past every exhibit not even beginning to slow down for the particular pieces I wanted them to see. There was an unwillingness to sit on the bench and gaze at the work I wanted them to take in. Instead, I was bombarded with the question, “Can we go to the gift shop?”**

**That was the day I began to loathe them—the dreaded gift shop! “Can we go to the gift shop?” Apparently this little day trip with the minister was enough to warrant Mom or Dad palming them some cash that was burning the proverbial hole in their pocket. I did my best not to let it get me, and eventually they wore me down. They wore me down so that the next time they asked, “Can we go to the gift shop?” I told them: “Go!”**

**We had only covered about half of what I wanted them to see, and so I told myself that if we got the gift shop thing out of the way then they would be able to better hear me describe what I wanted them to see in those few paintings that I really wanted them to take in.**

**They saw a shopping opportunity; I wanted them to see centuries old icons. I was sure that once the shopping was out of their system then we could hunker down and stare in the face of those great works of art. I was wrong! Once they finished at the gift shop they were ready to go.**

**Now mind you we spent almost as much time in the gift shop as we did in the entire rest of the museum. But—they had seen enough and they were done. Frankly, by that point I was done too! It would take some time for me to integrate that whole experience and frame it positively. Eventually I came to convince myself that though they did not sit before the painting and really, really, really take it in allowing themselves to just, if you will, fall into the piece of artwork...oh, even though they were not able to do that, they had at least seen those works of art.**

**I comforted myself by telling them one day I would bring them back when they were a little older, a little calmer, and less of consumers—that day I would bring them back and they would appreciate a little more those views and vistas that they would then be able to see. While there was that hopeful voice inside me, there was also that other voice inside me that said, “There is no way I will never do this again. Never, never, no way!”**

**In the end they did see some art—even if they saw it in the gift shop on mugs, and key chains, and posters. Most of them bought posters to decorate their rooms. They did go home with some new art and a different view of things.**

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**Jesus had traveled from where he had been doing ministry. The implication in the Gospel of Mark is that he was trying to get away. That he was going where he was going in order to either have some rest from all that he had been doing or to take the disciples away such that he could be alone with them.**

**In the first story we encounter Jesus in a house in Tyre. And there this woman who is a Gentile of Syrophoenician origin comes into the house. Apparently she has learned that he is there. It is also clear that she**

**knows Jesus is more than a mere celebrity. She knows that there is something, oh, something incredible about him.**

**She is desperate. Her daughter is in trouble. Mark says that her daughter had “an unclean spirit.” Mark has on the lips of Jesus a reference to this “unclean spirit” as a “demon.” Understand that in the first century, there were all sorts of conditions that would have been described with “unclean spirit” and “demon possession.” It had a different meaning then than it does now.**

**Regardless of how one interprets that, there was still the reality that this child was in need. And the woman comes in to advocate for Jesus’ help with her daughter. The fact that Jesus says to her, “Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs,”—that is alarming.**

**They seem like such harsh and judgmental words from Jesus. Jesus is trying to be clear about his purpose. His purpose was to come to Israel and to redeem the chosen people. And such clarity of purpose is formative in his response to the woman. But the woman, like one knocking on the door for justice, or like personified Wisdom of the Proverbs—oh the woman, does not cower and go away hanging her head. Instead, in her shrewdness, she answers Jesus by saying to him, “Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.”**

**She does not challenge Jesus, but rather she accepts his position, and says, “yes,...but.” Yes, she accepts Jesus’ priority of ministering first to the people of Israel, but she is not satisfied with that. Her faith calls out of a Jesus a larger vision of God’s mission to the Gentiles.**

**It is an “ah” moment...it is both an “ah-ha” and an “ah, how insightful of you to say that.” Jesus responds positively to that. As the woman returns home the child is well.**

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**It is a wonderful healing story. It is indeed, but the woman is what stands out. There are so many ways to look at this woman. But I want to look at this woman as a piece of art.**

**She is one of those old masters there in the gallery of Scripture. What she does is say, “Look at me.” Don’t just glance as you run to the gift shop. No, that is not enough—look! “You there—look; look at me.”**

**And as we stop in that gallery and take her in. As we stop and really take her in—the texture of the lines on her face, the brush strokes, the background that play prominently into the foreground—as we stop and take that in we see something—something that we did not see before...something that having seen it cannot be overlooked again. It is there! And it takes on a kind of life of its own.**

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**In this particular story it is reality that God’s saving work is not for Israel alone, but God is redeeming the whole of creation—even and always and ever this Gentile woman and her daughter with the challenges and the deaf man of the Deapolis too.**

**What she does is paint a picture of a whole different reality. It is a reality where the healing of all God’s creation is by the very hand of Jesus. It is a reality where a label of Jew or Gentile does not matter. It is a reality where salvation and wholeness are for all. It is a seeing of the cross in global and even cosmic way.**

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**In our story—God longs for us to stop long enough to look. God longs for us to stop long enough to see. God longs for us to slow down on**

**our way to the gift shop and to sit and gaze and see there a new reality for us.**

**We are so busy pushing to the next thing. We are so busy hurrying on through. We are so busy saying “yes” to everything that we never can say “no” in order to slow down and look.**

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**It is that saying “no” that is at the core of the commandment for the Sabbath. God creates in six days and it is good, and then on that seventh day God ceases. God rests. There is creation and then there is cessation. There is work and then there is rest.**

**It is that Sabbath piece that is important. It is important because it is the means by which God has blessed us in such a way that in a day or in a season or in a portion of time we pause not for the sake of pausing, but for the sake of seeing our world, our lives, and God in a new, fresh, and whole way.**

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**Sunday may be your Sabbath. But it may also be that you have some Sabbath time on Monday, or Friday or everyday at lunchtime. It is that time where allow God to show us something else. It is that time where we allow a new glimpse of reality to come in. It is that time where we stop and look at the art-work that is our living and take in the holiness of it.**

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**Play clothes. They are clothes that one wears for play. It does not matter if they get dirty. It does not matter if they get grass stains. It even does not matter if they get wet. Play clothes are worn by the child so that they can get out there and express themselves with all the freedom that can be brought together. No restrictions—just go for it.**

**See, I think it takes such freedom for us, as children of God, to see that God has created for us this limitless life of incredible love. We are usually so busy rushing from one professional obligation to another that we never slow down long enough to play with what it means that God loves you!**

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**It really is what it is—that in the gallery of our lives—we stop long enough to play and see and imagine a world where all our hungers are fed and all our thirsts are answered. We will never find such a reality at the gift shop, but only in the One who gifts us this love that “makes us well.”**

**See here, in this table, in poured out cup and in broken bread the possibility. See here the possibility that your life is more than what you thought it was yesterday. See here the possibility that that the God who loves you calls you live joyfully in love—delighted, playful, full of possibilities. See it. Taste it. “Taste and see that the Lord is good.”**

**Amen.**