

**Be Opened, by Daniel H. Kuhn, Jr. 14090906**  
**James 2:1-10, 14-17 and Mark 7:24-37**  
**Elon Community Church, United Church of Christ, 6 September, 2009**

The title of our story today could be, “The day Jesus’ mind was opened!” Now, that may be a difficult concept for some of you to grasp, because you have been taught that Jesus came to this earth as a full-blown savior and perfect at birth because he was divine. I’m sorry for that teaching. I’m sorry for doctrines that persist on their own and set people’s minds in stone. I’m not here to take that belief away, but I’d like you to consider this. I’d like you to consider that today’s gospel reading contains three stories of healing, that of the Syrophenician woman’s daughter, that of the deaf man with a speech impediment, and that of Jesus himself.

Think for a moment about all of the things Jesus had been taught in his upbringing. He had been taught whom God loves and whom God rejects, who is good and who is bad, with whom a good Jew can associate with and with whom he shouldn’t. Jesus was taught that God loved only the Jews. Gentiles and Samaritans were to be avoided as unclean. Oh, and women had no value. Those were the unquestioned doctrines that were taught by the tradition.

So, here Jesus was, a Jew in foreign territory. He was weary of all of the people clamoring for him. He decided to take a vacation up in Tyre and Sidon. He didn’t want anyone to know he was there. But, word got out. A local woman, a non-Jew, went up to Jesus, fell down at his feet and begged him to heal her daughter who had a demon, perhaps some kind of nervous disorder. Many of you can relate to how concerned this mother would be.

Jesus refused, saying “Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs.”<sup>1</sup> By this, Jesus meant that his healing, his ministry, was meant for Jews and Jews only.

Some interpreters have tried to temper Jesus’ remark by saying he meant cute little puppies. No, there is no tempering Jesus’ remark. It was an outright insult, and he was calling the woman, her daughter, and all Gentiles, dogs, and dogs were not playful house pets in that place at that time.

As they say here in the South, “Bless her heart,” the woman persisted. Was she still groveling at his feet? Or by now, was she standing, looking at him eye to eye? Did she grab him by the hand as she said, “Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.”<sup>2</sup> That’s the instant when Jesus was healed.

She caught him by her argument. He looked at her and saw, not a Gentile or a woman, but a person— a neighbor. He was healed of the prejudice he had been taught. His mind was opened to the terrible hypocrisy created by religious doctrine. Miraculously, he saw this woman and her daughter as children of God.

Now, he was putting his own words into action. He took to heart what he said a few verses earlier to the Pharisees, the teachers of tradition, “This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching human precepts as doctrines. You

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<sup>1</sup>Mark 7:27

<sup>2</sup>Mark 7:28

abandon the commandment of God and hold to human tradition.”<sup>3</sup> The commandment of God is, Love God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength, and love your neighbor as yourself.<sup>4</sup> The doctrine of exclusion of Gentiles was a denial of God’s commandment to love one’s neighbor.

Sadly, we still have followers of Jesus who follow human doctrines of exclusion. There are followers of Jesus who are less accepting of women and strangers, and those they feel might be unclean or unworthy of acceptance. They have been indoctrinated that way. I just heard of a church in Chapel Hill, a fairly large mega-church, that has a sign in its entrance lobby, “This is a male authority church.” That is not the way of Jesus. Counter to his own culture, he spoke with and healed women, and he included them among his disciples.

Sadly, we have followers of Jesus who have been indoctrinated to say nothing good about government. Tell me, if you owned a house in the path of the Station Fire in California, would you be complaining about the government? It is government– local, state, and federal– that is fighting that fire. Government provides our Elon Fire Department. You don’t have to contract with a fire company to protect your home as people in this country had to one hundred fifty years ago. The two fire fighters who lost their lives last week in California were government employees.

You say you don’t like the federal government sticking its nose in local people’s business? If the federal government kept out of local people’s business, we would still have to provide separate restrooms for Blacks and Whites. Oh, perhaps we wouldn’t because we would still exclude Blacks from this church because that was the local custom. Just because something is a local practice doesn’t make it right or good. We need a larger perspective. We need a God’s-eye perspective that says even the Syro-Phoenician woman is worthy.

Sadly, we have followers of Jesus who think that we have the best health care system in the world and we shouldn’t do anything to change it. This is the Jesus who healed all sorts of people, not just those wealthy enough to afford it. If we have such a great health care system, how come we have the highest health care costs in the world and yet rank number thirty-three in infant death rates?<sup>5</sup>

Personally, I like the government involved in health care. Otherwise, I would not be able to receive Medicare. By the way, the cost overhead of government-run medicare is four percent. The cost overhead of health insurance companies averages thirty percent. What do insurance companies contribute to health care? For their thirty percent profit, insurance companies do not set bones. They do not apply bandages. They just collect higher and higher insurance premiums. They have no incentive to keep health care costs down. Followers of Jesus, the man who healed others, the man who was concerned about the poor and the oppressed, should be outraged when anyone is excluded from health care.

No one is excluded from the table of Jesus Christ. No one gets stuck with only the crumbs that fall from Jesus’ table. All who come to the table get the loaf. All are fed by this one who knew the enormity of God’s love.

Jesus mind was opened that day in the region of Tyre by the Syro-Phoenician woman’s request. By following Jesus, our minds will be opened also. Our hearts can be opened with the

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<sup>3</sup>Mark 7:6-8

<sup>4</sup>Mark 12:30

<sup>5</sup>Wikipedia, List of Countries by Infant Mortality Rate

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