

“Be Opened” – Rev. Jennifer Adams
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Wow that was a lot to have happen in a mere 13 verses of gospel. Did you catch it all? Two stories, lots of healing and a sprinkle of religious/cultural issues thrown in to make it even more exciting. So here we go. First we got the story of the Syrophenician woman, one of my favorite stories in all of Scripture. The Syrophenician woman you heard was a Gentile (which is part of why her coming to Jesus was such a big deal.) She had come to find him because her daughter was very ill and she believed that Jesus could help her. So the woman found Jesus and his disciples even though they were trying to sneak in a little break and she bowed at Jesus feet and begged him to release her daughter from the demon. And Jesus first response was one that still holds the record as the #1 worst response ever given by a Messiah, “Let the children be fed first,” Jesus told her, “for it is not fair to take the children’s food and feed it to the dogs.” Which, roughly translated meant “Go away at least for now. I am caring for God’s chosen. And, that’s not you.” But the woman didn’t let it end there. Instead of accepting what Jesus had said, she came back with what stands as the #1 most brilliant response ever given a Messiah, “Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.” In other words, “We’re hungry too and we’re already taking in the gifts you came to give.” Now I’m guessing that at that point bet there was at least a moment of silence as the disciples held their collective breath to see what would happen next. And what happened was that Jesus listened and heard what she was saying, what she was really saying. Then he congratulated this Gentile woman for her strength of faith and right there in front of the disciples expanded the limits of those whom he would feed and heal. He assured the woman that her daughter would be free and upon returning home the woman found her daughter well and the demon gone. Then before we could blink Jesus went to another town. And while he was there, the people took Jesus to a deaf man with a speech impediment and they begged Jesus to lay his hands on him. Again there is this deep desire to be healed. And so, Jesus took the man aside in private, away from the crowds, put his fingers in his ears, spat and touched his tongue and said, “Ephphatha,” which means “Be opened.” And immediately the man was able to hear and to speak, the disciples and all the people were “astounded beyond measure,” and the more Jesus asked them to be quiet about it all, the more zealously the proclaimed the good news.

And all of that is quite a lot for one Sunday morning’s gospel. But I think the key to it all is actually quite simple and was right there tucked in at the very end of the passage. “Ephphatha,” Jesus said, “be opened.” Notice he didn’t say “be fixed” or “let your ears work now” or even “may your hearing and speech be restored.” He simply said “be opened.” Both stories this morning tell us that at the heart of healing there is openness, an openness to the often surprising and miraculous ways in which God works.

And we need to be reminded of that. Because when it comes to healing, sometimes we act like that saying “can’t see the forest for the trees.” We get so focused in on the details of whatever it is we’re seeking that we lose sight of the bigger picture that that something is about. When it comes to our own healing we can get so intent on the particulars that we forget those particulars already sit inside of a much larger promise of wholeness and peace. I think that’s actually what happened to Jesus in the first story. He was so intensely focused in on feeding the children of Israel that he lost sight of the children of God, a much broader group that included the Gentiles

and all who would come seeking what it was that he had to give. He actually forgot how big the thing was that God was doing. And so a faithful Gentile came begging but it was the Messiah who was opened up.

And that would be my prayer for us. That when we get too small in our focus, we expand our attention and our prayers to include the bigger things of God. Which doesn't mean the specifics aren't important, it only means that they already sit within the embrace of a much larger wholeness, a much broader peace of God. And if we are too small in our vision, too tightly focused all the time we could miss out on the many varied and broad and wide gifts God is giving us every day. May we be humble enough to listen to the Syrophenician woman to come to us in faith and if we have trouble hearing may we allow the Messiah to touch our ears, and in doing so open our hearts to not only the strength of the trees but the beautiful forest of our God.