

Undeserving

Mark 7:24-37

Introduction

One day Jesus took a walk. Following an intense period of time in His ministry, Jesus needed to get away. Our Gospel lesson is recorded in the last half of Mark chapter 7. In the previous chapter (that is, chapter 6) Jesus ...

- Received news that His cousin John the Baptist had been beheaded
- Fed the 5,000
- Walked on Water
- And in the first half chapter seven Jesus engages in a heated conversation with the religious leaders about the rituals of the faith. That was our text last week when we talked about the "INSIDE OUT" principle.

That's a lot in a short amount of time, and Jesus needed to get away. You can relate to that, right? There are times when you just need to get away.

As a preacher's kid, my family always went "away" whenever Dad had vacation time. "Where are you going on vacation?" parishioners would ask. "Away," my dad would answer.

- We lived in the parsonage next door to the church, so if we stayed at home Dad found it hard to be "away." So, to get "away" we had to go "away."
- We would pack up our Apache hard-sided fold up camper and leave town.
- Where we were going didn't matter ... as long as it was "away."
- I like to plan the vacations Karen and I take. But not so with Dad. With the exception of one trip out west, I don't ever remember my parents having a plan in advance of a vacation.
- "Dad. Where are we going on vacation?" "Away."

Jesus needed to get away. So, in our text He took a walk. He headed north, up to the coastal cities of Tyre and Sidon ... far, far away from Galilee.

- Presumably Jesus chose that location because it was Gentile territory.
- Surely no one would know Him there. No one would want anything from Him. No one would try to engage Him in a theological argument.
- That's what the last two chapters had been all about.

Why Tyre? One writer described Tyre as ...

... the Las Vegas of that day: big city, bright lights, diverse population, and most decidedly not Jewish.

That's not Mark's description in our text. Mark simply tells us that Jesus chose that location to get away.

(Jesus) went to the city of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know it ... (Mark 7:24)

He wanted to be “away.”

In order to get away, Jesus walked roughly 50 miles from where He had been in the first 20 verses of this chapter, which is probably more than two days journey.

Unfortunately, He did not walk far enough. That is, if His goal was to get to a place where no one knew Him, where no one recognized Him and where no one paid any attention to Him, where no one wanted anything from Him, He needed to keep walking, for Mark adds:

(Jesus) went to the city of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know it ... *yet He could not keep His presence secret.* (Mark 7:24)

Mark adds:

In fact, as soon as she heard about (Jesus), a woman whose little daughter was possessed by an impure spirit came and fell at His feet. The woman was a Greek ... (Mark 7:25-26)

Vegas wasn't far enough. He should have walked to Los Angeles.

For the most part, I think, the disciples enjoyed watching Jesus perform miracles. But from their perspective on this day away, everything about this woman and what she was doing was wrong. Mark records it just in case you missed it:

- She was a woman. Nice women didn't approach men they didn't know. Remember the story of the woman at the well?
- She was a Greek. Wrong nationality! Jesus came for the Jews. He was their Messiah.
- She interrupted the meal. How rude! It could have waited until after dinner.
- She intruded on His “away” time. How inconsiderate!
- She was pushy and she talked back.
- She came expecting something from Jesus.

Who was she to think Jesus would do anything for her? She was so ... so ... so ...

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Clearly He wasn't going to get away in Vegas, so before the whole town brought all of their sick people for Him to heal, Jesus took another walk. This time He walked all the way to a region known as the Decapolis.

- That hike took Him back past His home base.
- But also took Him another good distance farther east.
- And it took Him back into another Gentile territory.

The Decapolis was sort of a mini-state with ten large cities, a region that entered its own agreement with the Romans prior to the time of Jesus. During the time of Christ, it had little to do with Jews and the Jewish faith.

- How do we know that? Well, for one thing, they raised pigs there! You might remember the story where Jesus sent a demon into a herd of pigs and the pigs ran off the cliff and died. That happened in this region of the Decapolis.
- Pigs were unclean by Jewish Law, so for that reason the Jews stayed as far away from there as possible and the Gentiles did not pay any attention to Jewish Law.

If the Jews won't go there, and the residents don't like the Jewish religion, surely Jesus could get "away" there. No one would interrupt Him in the Decapolis. Would they?

The Gospel of Mark does not tell us how long it took but after verse 31 tells us Jesus arrived, in the very next verse – verse 32 – Mark says:

There some people brought to Him a man who was deaf and could hardly talk, and they begged Jesus to place His hand on him. (Mark 7:32)

We don't know much about this man that came to Jesus.

- He wasn't a Jew. He was a foreigner. A Gentile, most likely.
- He couldn't speak any language that Jesus could understand.
- Because of his life circumstances, he was unable to take care of himself. He couldn't work. He couldn't support himself.
- He didn't even come to Jesus on his own. He was totally dependent on others to bring him.
- And he interrupted Jesus' vacation.

This guy was ...

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The Gospel doesn't say it, but since he was from the Decapolis, maybe he was ... a pig farmer, too. Definitely undeserving.

As you know, September is our stewardship month. Throughout this month we are developing our stewardship theme:

"Walking ON in Grace."

It's theme that captures our memories of the walk taken by the people of Grace 25 years ago as they relocated from 21 E. Harding Road to 1801 St. Paris Pike. Throughout the month we are asking ourselves a simple question: What does it mean for this congregation to "Walking on in Grace." Where is God leading us now?

When Jesus takes a walk, where might He take us? Based on this text, let me make a couple of suggestions on how we might answer that question:

#1: IF WE TRULY WALK WITH JESUS, HE WILL TAKE US TO MEET PEOPLE WHO ARE UNDESERVING

We will meet them while we are eating dinner at the local restaurant, in the grocery store, in the library, in our schools and at work. We might even meet them in church. That is what James the brother of Jesus warned about when he wrote the words of our Epistle lesson today:

Suppose a man enters your church wearing an expensive suit, and a street person wearing rags comes in right after him ... (James 2:2)

In other words, what if someone undeserving shows up some Sunday?

One day Jesus was eating at Matthew's house. The guest list included what the Bible calls "disreputable sinners."

Later, Matthew invited Jesus and his disciples to his home as dinner guests, along with many tax collectors and other disreputable sinners. (Matthew 9:10)

The religious leaders objected:

But when the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with such scum?" (Matthew 9:11)

The response of Jesus set them back. The kingdom of heaven, He says, isn't for people who deserve it. It is for the undeserving.

For I have come to call not those who think they are righteous, but those who know they are sinners. (Matthew 9:13)

Walking with Jesus means that we never meet anyone who is undeserving, nor do we treat them that way. Because even when He is on vacation, God cares for those the world calls undeserving.

#2: IF WE TRULY WALK WITH JESUS, ON OUR JOURNEY WE WILL COME TO SEE OURSELVES AS UNDESERVING

Paul the Apostle – back when he was known as Saul the Pharisee – thought of himself as very deserving. He was:

I was circumcised when I was eight days old. I am a pure-blooded citizen of Israel and a member of the tribe of Benjamin—a real Hebrew if there ever was one! I was a member of the Pharisees, who demand the strictest obedience to the Jewish law. I was so zealous that I harshly persecuted the church. (Philippians 3:5-6)

But then he started to walk with Jesus. And his opinion of himself changed.

This is a trustworthy saying, and everyone should accept it: "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners"—and I am the worst of them all. (1 Timothy 1:15)

Many Christians never get anywhere near that point. We see ourselves as somewhat bad but not awful bad. We are good at seeing sawdust.

And why worry about a speck in your friend's eye when you have a log in your own? First get rid of the log in your own eye; then you will see well enough to deal with the speck in your friend's eye. (Matthew 7:3, 5)

Don't forget, Jesus says, that you are undeserving too. That's important place to reach on our journey with Jesus because Jesus came to save those who were undeserving. Remember?

APPLICATION

On Sunday mornings before any of the rest of you arrive, I walk through the glass doors at the back of the sanctuary. Even in the darkness the first thing I see is the cross. You can't enter this space without being confronted with the cross.

I wonder what the worshippers in 1999 felt when they walked through those same doors. You have to see the cross. You can't come to Grace and avoid seeing the cross.

Someone once said that the only level ground in the entire world is beneath the cross of Jesus. There we are all undeserving. No exceptions. But there too we all find grace.

The grace we find there should prompt in us a response.

- First, we should be moved into a deeper relationship with God – the one who saved undeserving people like us.
- Second, we should be moved to dedicate all of who we are – our Time, Talent, Treasure and Testimony – to His mission in this world so that everyone might come to the foot of the cross so they too can find God's grace.

Walk on in Grace!

Amen.