

Let us pray...May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, for you are our strength and you are most certainly our redeemer. Amen.

Sisters and brothers in Christ, today's gospel reading is really eye-opening.

Today's gospel reading is really startling, for we see something unusual in this gospel.

And I am not talking about the healing of a child who was possessed by an unclean spirit.

Yes, that is remarkable, but there is something else.

Nor am I talking about the healing of a deaf man with a speech impediment.

Although, again, that too is quite remarkable.

No, what is truly eye-opening, what is truly startling in this gospel is that our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the divine Son, has a learning moment.

Now, we probably think of Jesus as all-knowing.

We probably think of Jesus as omniscient.

We think of Jesus, who as God's Son, has insight into all things, right?

So how is it that Jesus experiences a learning moment in this gospel?

How is it that Jesus is instructed by the Syrophenician woman in this gospel?

How is it that Jesus has his eyes are opened, his mind expanded, his perspective broadened?

Now, maybe we missed it, maybe we didn't catch it the first time.

So let me read that portion of the gospel for us again.

"A woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately heard about Jesus, and she came and bowed down at his feet."

"Now the woman was a Gentile, of Syrophenician origin."

“She begged Jesus to cast the demon out of her daughter.”

But Jesus 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.”

Now, that is some harsh language no matter how you spin in. The woman seeks healing for her daughter, and Jesus rejects her outright, because she is not among the so called “children of God,” namely the Jewish people.

She is a Gentile, of Syrophenician birth, whom Jesus lumps into the category of “dogs.”

But the woman is not to be dismissed so lightly.

She stands up for herself saying, “Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.”

To which, Jesus is so impressed that he heals the woman’s daughter.

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Yes, what is truly profound in this gospel passage is not that Jesus heals the woman’s daughter, nor that Jesus goes on to heal the deaf man with a speech impediment in the next scene.

What is truly startling in this passage is that Jesus experiences an awakening of sorts here.

Jesus is enlightened.

Jesus has his perspective broadened by the words of the Syrophenician woman.

And we don’t know exactly what is going on here in this text.

Was Jesus speaking to the woman through his human nature, thus the remark about throwing the children’s food to dogs, thus Jesus’ growth in understanding?

Who knows?

Who knows why this gospel passage depicts Jesus the way it does?

But the startling, remarkable thing is not just that Jesus is enlightened here in this encounter with the Syrophenician woman.

The really startling is that this encounter is not just a one-off.

Jesus doesn't just engage the Syrophenician woman, a Gentile, resulting in the healing of her daughter...

Jesus doesn't just share some of the children's food to this woman and then go back to doing ministry exclusively for the Jews.

No, this Syrophenician woman actually changes the ministry of Jesus as a whole.

From this point on in Mark's Gospel, Jesus' ministry includes both Jew and Gentile.

We see that in the healing of the deaf man with a speech impediment.

For Jesus is in the Decapolis when he heals this man, the Decapolis being a predominantly Gentile region.

In short, this episode in which Jesus encounters the Syrophenician woman...

This encounter marks a turning point in Jesus' ministry.

Jesus is no longer focused on Jews alone.

And it may be that Jesus suddenly recognized, by the interaction with the Syrophenician woman, that with the coming of the promised kingdom of God, there was the expectation that Gentiles would stream to God.

And so part of the mission of any servant of God, would have to include an outreach to Gentiles.

Indeed the prophets of the Old Testament gave voice to this notion that all nations, which included Gentiles, would come to God's house.

Isaiah 2:2-4 and Micah 4:1-3 read similarly in this regard.

They write: "In the days to come the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills; all the nation shall stream to it."

"Many peoples shall come and say, 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.' For out of Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem."

The apostle Paul also understood this idea that the mission of an evangelist included evangelizing Gentiles, which is why Paul saw his specific missionary work to Gentiles while Peter's missionary work was to Jews.

But the point being, Jesus' encounter with the Syrophenician woman was a turning point in Jesus' ministry.

And we call these moments that are ripe with change, we call these moments Kairos moments.

Kairos moments are moments when history pivots, turns, or goes in a new direction.

Kairos moments are moments that involve God's intervention in history.

It is what the hymn we will sing in a moment calls, "eternity in time." And because Kairos moments involve GOD'S intervention, you will not find the mention of Kairos in any high school and college history book.

History books of that nature are more concerned with chronos time.

Chronos time is time that is concerned with days, weeks, months, and years.

Chronos time is time that is concerned with when a particular event happened on the proverbial time line.

Chronos time is about the chronology of events as they are laid out over the expanse of given period.

But Kairos time is concerned with God's time.

Kairos time is concerned with God's intervention within history for the sake of fulfilling God's plan for humanity and all creation.

Kairos time is eternity in time.

So, the book we call the Bible is a different kind of history book from the one in high school and college.

The Bible is historiography, in which history is written as though dictated by God. The Bible contains historical events, but it often talks about those events with respect to God working out God's plan for God's people and all creation.

Take for instance, the moment when Pharaoh's daughter comes upon Moses in a basket in the reeds by the River Nile.

Out of mercy and compassion for baby Moses the Egyptian princess rescues him from the waters and so then sets a course of events in motion whereby Moses will free his people from slavery in Egypt.

That is a Kairos moment, whereby God acts in history through an Egyptian princess to bring about the liberation of his chosen people.

Or, take for instance, the moment when King Cyrus of Persia decides to release the Jewish people from captivity so that they can return to their homeland and rebuild the Jewish Temple.

That is a particular moment in history, but the Bible sees it as a Kairos moment, whereby God used King Cyrus to re-establish God's people in the Holy Land.

And there are other Kairos moments...

The start of the Reformation, when Martin Luther posted the *95 Theses* to the castle church in Wittenberg, which eventually led to the transformation of the religious landscape in Europe, that was a Kairos moment.

When the world mobilized to confront the Axis powers, when the Nazi regime was destroyed, and when the concentration camps were liberated—that Allies response to horrific evil was a Kairos moment.

When Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on a bus, which helped then to spark the Civil Rights movement in this country in the 1960s—that was a Kairos moment.

History is full of Kairos moments, moments when God was acting in history.

But sisters and brothers in Christ, in terms of Kairos moments there are few that hold a light to the one we see in our Gospel passage today, because without that Syrophenician woman, the Christian Faith would look very different.

The reason you and me are sitting here today in Church is because that woman of Syrophenician origin had the audacity to stand up to Jesus and all but demand that he heal her daughter.

Which then set in motion Jesus' ministry to Gentiles as well as Jews.

If Jesus hadn't reach out to Gentiles, and if Paul subsequently didn't reach out to Gentiles, there is no Church with you and me in it.

All because of that Syrophenician woman. All because of that Kairos moment.

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No, history doesn't explain why things happen.

History just tells us the what, the when, the where of particular events.

A global pandemic envelopes our world in 2019. Hurricane Ida strikes the Gulf Coast in August 2021. The forest fire known as the Camp Fire scorches California in November 2018.

History tells us the what, the when, the where, but it doesn't tell us the why—it doesn't tell us why these things occur.

Sure we can respond with things like Global warming and the like in response to why.

However, in the past, the Bible oftentimes couch such events in terms of God's judgment or wrath.

Personally, I hesitate to say that any natural disaster nor any human-made disaster is somehow a result of God's wrath.

I don't see those things as God's intervention in history. I don't see those things as Kairos moments.

But, I will say that the human response to crises in our world are Kairos moments.

That is how God intervenes in the world through people, like you and me, so as to steer the world in the way of God's plan.

Martin Luther, Rosa Parks, King Cyrus, the Egyptian princess, that Syrophenician woman—these persons...these persons acted by the grace of God to do God's will for the well-being of God's people.

These persons helped steer the course for the fulfillment of God's plan.

And the fact remains then, that our lives might in some small or even large capacity play a role in the plans of God.

Our small act of compassion and mercy, like the Egyptian princess might set in motion a course of events that we cannot see the end, but which has profound effects.

Our rebuttal to another's indifference like that of the Syrophenician woman might cause a chain reaction of circumstances whereby God's plans come to fruition.

We don't always know how our actions may reap unforeseen benefits.

It is like the Butterfly Effect, where a butterfly's wings stir up the air in Asia so as to change the weather pattern in the United States.

We don't always know how our actions may serve God's purposes.

But, be assured that God will use us, if we are open to the Spirit...

If we are mindful of the power of Kairos moments...

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Yes, God's eternity can and does impact our time, most profoundly through the actions of people.

And we need no further proof of this truth than that of the cross.

For Jesus' cross is the paramount Kairos moment.

Indeed, in the person of Jesus Christ, God powerfully intervened in history for the sake of fulfilling his plan of redemption for all people and for all creation. Thanks be to God. Amen.