

I would like to think that there are a lot of things I do well. I can shoot a basketball pretty decently, you need a Golden Girls reference I could offer you about a hundred of them, looking for book recommendations, I've got them. However, there is one thing that I absolutely, entirely do not do well...change. I cannot stand change, and I know that's a fairly common experience for a lot of people, but it's just one of those things that tends to leave me at a complete standstill.

Case in point...my hair has looked exactly like this, give or take an inch or two since I was basically sixteen years old. I rarely, if ever, order anything other than what I always order at Chick-Fil-A. I have a rhythm and pattern to how I get ready in the morning and how I get ready for bed. Big change, little change, medium change...I don't like it. You can imagine my mom's surprise when my seventeen year old self declared that I was moving to Pennsylvania for college, when I was the kid that didn't even like spending the night away from home at a friend's house that was like five houses down from ours.

All of this means that for the longest time, I have deeply admired and been a smidge jealous of people who are able to roll with change like it's no big deal. Those people who chase after change, advocate for it, welcome it with open arms...I don't get how they do it, and I wish that I was more like

them. It's not for lack of trying, but let's face it. Whether you love it or hate it, change is hard, and I think that's because change tends to come with a heavy dose of learning along with it, and frankly, most of the time, all of us are quite content to stay stuck in our ways, not wanting to expand our minds, our hearts, our plans beyond the simple four corners that we have built for ourselves. And honestly, while I know that I'm not alone in my change resistant mentality, it helps immensely to realize that it seems, even Jesus struggled with change when he came face to face with it. Yet, in Jesus, we also have the example of how we adapt to change, how we accept it, how we embrace it, and ultimately how we let it change us for the better.

I've said it before, and I will probably say it every time this gospel comes up in the lectionary, but man, this one makes me struggle. It makes me struggle because I'm uninterested in any explanation of what happens between Jesus and the Syrophenician Woman as some variation on the usual string of excuses: Jesus was tired, Jesus was having a bad day, Jesus just wanted a break. I'm sorry...if this story was simply an example of Jesus acting out of character because he was in a bad mood, then it probably wouldn't have made the gospel cut, *especially* in Mark. Of all the gospel writers, Mark is the most succinct and to the point. He doesn't add what doesn't need to be added. There is nothing extra in Mark, it is a well-honed

machine of a gospel, barely at breakneck pace towards the conclusion, so the idea that he would insert a story in his already bare bones gospel that was simply a throwaway like, oh yes, and here is Jesus when he was cranky, is just entirely implausible to me. This story is here because it serves a purpose, it has a point, and I think the point is...change.

We do find Jesus seeking out a break this morning. He's traveled northwest from Galilee and is up along the eastern coast of the Mediterranean around the city of Tyre. Now, here's what you need to know about Tyre. It was part of a wider region that was a booming economic hub. Given its coastal location, it was a hotbed for trade, and naturally that made its population exceedingly wealthy. But here's the thing...while Tyre was rolling in the trade business, it didn't have a lot of farmland nearby. So where did they get their bread? From the much more arable, but much poorer Galilee. Jesus' hometown territory literally served as the breadbasket for their wealthy neighbors to the north, who had way more power, influence, and goods than them, and used that power to extract as much food from their poorer neighbors as possible. So, what exactly do you think the relationship was between Galileans and their wealthy neighbors? Bitter and hostile don't really seem to even come close. If economic prejudices

weren't enough, let's throw another log on the fire...the people in this region? Mostly Gentiles...

So, here we find Jesus. He is in a border land, with some Jewish siblings around, but mostly, he's surrounded by people he has probably been raised to have a great deal of disdain for. People who have taken advantage of Galilee for decades and who have no tolerance for their relationship with God. And into his space of seeking solace, one of these people comes up to Jesus, and asks for...a miracle. Her daughter is possessed, and this woman believes that only Jesus can help. Despite their differences, economic, gender, religious, she sees in Jesus the one person who can save her daughter. And Jesus says...no. In what may have been a hint at how much bread her people have literally stolen out of the mouths of those in Galilee, he says that what he has to give, is meant for those who are chosen, God's children. It wouldn't be fair to give anything to her, when her people have already taken so much, and then, Jesus does the unthinkable and snaps at her and likens her to a dog. It's not a pretty picture. But God bless this woman, she dares to push back, to say that even dogs deserve some crumbs every now and then. She doesn't back down, not from this insult and not from her ardent belief that Jesus is the only one who can help her. She believes. Her faith pours out of her, even when she has been rebuffed.

And what happens? Jesus heals her daughter. And while that is a miracle what happens after is even more miraculous. From there Mark gives us a lot of geographic details which seem irrelevant, but they aren't. He tells us that from Tyre, Jesus travels to the Decapolis by way of Sidon. To put this in terms of modern day I-64 travel, that's like saying you went to Norfolk by way of Williamsburg. Jesus literally goes north to go south. It makes no sense, so why does he do it? It just so happens that Sidon is purely Gentile territory. It's not a border area. It's rock solid Gentile. After his encounter with this woman, Jesus intentionally goes out of his way to travel amongst those are not Jewish. After his encounter with this bold, brazen woman, I am inclined to say that Jesus...was changed.

I think actually, Jesus perfectly encapsulates what happened to him in Tyre when he heals the man he meets around the Decapolis. Jesus sighs, and with his hands touching this man's mouth and ears, he prays that he, "Be opened." That his entire self might change to let in sound and let out words. That his mind might be open and receptive to these changes. I think it's a bit of Jesus proclaiming what just happened to him, sitting in that region surrounded by people he might be inclined to dislike and judge, he realized he needed to be open to change. He needed to be open to the idea that as the

Messiah he hadn't just come for the Jewish people, but for *all* people.

Gentiles included. Those whom he had spent his life disliking included.

We all have those spaces in our lives where God is desperately trying to open our ears and loosen our tongues, where God is desperately willing us to be opened, to be opened to change, to acceptance, to love, to grace, not just for ourselves, but for others. We all have those people we can think of that we look at in the same way Galileans would have looked at Syrophenicians. Those people we refuse to accept because we feel like they have taken something away from us, even if that's a really flawed view of holistic reality. Those people we refuse to accept because we've been told our whole lives that we're just not supposed to because they're different from us. Those people we refused to accept because we flat out don't want to, and we're uninterested in learning about them or educating ourselves to change our mindset. I don't even need to name the list, because we all know who they are for us. It doesn't matter who we are, where we are, where we have come from, we've all got someone, some group that if they said they needed our help, we would call them a dog and turn away from them.

Yet...here in this gospel, we find that even Jesus needed to be called to account in order to find more room in his heart for grace. Even Jesus needed a moment to recognize he needed to be more open. But here's the

thing...he did it. He changed. He opened up. He went into those places he had before ignored and he brought the love of God, the healing presence of his being, and an acceptance he might have never known he was capable of. And I know, we aren't Jesus, but...we are called to exemplify Christ as much as we are capable in this world. To walk into those places the rest of the world would avoid. To love those people the world has said are unlovable. To put to rest hatred, discrimination, and prejudice, even when the rest of the world thinks that it's ok to proclaim those things.

Don't get me wrong, I hate change as much as the next person. I know that changing your heart, opening your mind can be scary, and yet...it is our gospel call. It is our gospel call to dare to look into the heart and into the eyes of our neighbor and value them, for everything that they are, even when everything that they are is different from us. There is not a single person on this earth that is not worthy of God's grace, of God's love. But who are supposed to be the bringers of that love, that grace? We are. We are meant to be the ones who infuse this beautiful creation with love, for all of God's children. There are more people than I can even begin to count on this planet who need a reminder that they are loved, that they are seen. So even if we have to go north to go south to tell them, let's do that. Let's change. Let's dare, for once, to be opened. **AMEN!!!**