

SERMON – PASTOR GREG
8.09.2024

Mark 7:24-37. *The woman was a Greek, born in Syrian Phoenicia. She begged Jesus to drive the demon out of her daughter. "First let the children eat all they want," (Jesus) told her, "for it is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs." "Yes, Lord," she replied, "but even the dogs under the table eat the children's food." Then he told her, "For such a reply, you may go; the demon had left your daughter." She went home and found her child lying on the bed, and the demon gone. Let us pray.*

IS IT FUN? A couple of Saturday mornings ago I asked this question of one of the coffee shop men. He had just told us that he and his wife and another couple were going on a five-day trek through the rainforest near Mackay- up near Eungella. They had to take all the needed apart from water. Sleeping bags, cooking utensils, clothing, food – anything they thought they would need. And they had to carry it themselves. I suggested that they also take a small bottle of ti-tree oil to get rid of the ticks and leeches that might attach themselves to them. I have been up in that country. Mind you, I have never done a trip like they are intending to do. All four are about 54 years of age. After hearing of his story I asked the question: "Will it be fun?" My friend pondered for a moment and replied, "No- it won't be fun". I then asked the obvious question: Then why are you doing it? "Because it will be a challenge and rewarding when it is completed".

Later on I thought about the question that I asked: Will it be fun? And then I began considering what is 'fun' Will it be entertaining? Will it be easy or difficult? And another thought came my way: how most of us are seeking to be happy. And then: what makes us happy? And then a strange thought came my way: Was Jesus a happy person?

What do you think? Was Jesus a happy person? Did he laugh a lot? Did he tell jokes? Was he a fun person to be with? Was he the centre of attention at parties because he was so much fun to be with?

A woman with a child seriously ill- in fact her daughter was possessed by an unclean spirit. And according to the Mosaic Law- she herself was an unclean person- an outsider to the Jewish people. In fact, this whole story takes place in 'unclean' territory- in the vicinity of Tyre. A place outside of Israel-in a place where idols were worshipped- a place where no decent Jewish person would be. Yet Jesus was there. I am reminded of Isaiah when he beheld GOD on his throne: "*Woe to me! I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips and I live among a people of unclean lips and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty!*" But these are not the words of the Syro-Phoenician woman- in her desperation, in fear, in hope she came to Jesus and begged him to help. And at first it seems that Jesus rejected her- even insinuating that she was no better than a dog. Jesus- meek and mild? Or Jesus- mean and wild? One of our members is currently reading a book with that title: JESUS-MEAN AND WILD! But the woman did not give up: *Yes, Lord," she replied, "but even the dogs under the table eat the children's food."*

Martin Luther has a great take on this story. It is a call to faith, it is a call to live not by sight but by faith- it is a call to trust Jesus-even when he says NO. The woman did not give up on Jesus. In the parallel account in Mathew's gospel Jesus replied to the woman: "*Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted*". *And her daughter was healed from that very hour.*

This story is about trusting in Jesus- in God even when it seems that HE has forgotten us or even worse- ignoring us. It is a story that proclaims that God loves all people and wants all people to know and love Him but that this is only possible through Jesus Christ.

But I want to return to that question: Is it fun? Was it fun for the woman to have a daughter who was possessed by an unclean spirit? Was it fun to be considered an outsider? We hear nothing of her husband or family- was she and her daughter all alone? Was it fun to go up to a stranger- a foreigner- of whom she must have heard so much about? Was it fun to beg?

In so many ways the modern church has fallen into the trap of trying to make the Christian life fun and entertaining and easy. We have tried to make everybody happy. One texts that I have found challenging over the years is this: 1 Cor 9:22,33: *I have become all things to all people, so that by all possible means I might save some I try to please everybody in every way. I am not seeking my own good by the good of many.* And of course Paul knows that it is not he that is saving anyone- it is only and ever the Lord Jesus Christ. But did Paul try to make the Christian life –fun? Of course not- so why do we?

The life of a Christian will involve suffering for Christ. All human beings suffer but in some ways it is harder for us. We know God as the gracious and compassionate God- slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and forgiveness. We know that Jesus Christ has paid the price for our sins. We know that –because Jesus is our Good Shepherd- we will live in the house of the Lord for ever. We know that God is with us and will never forsake us. So when suffering comes our way- we ask the question: WHY. When we see the suffering in the world, we ask again WHY?

Many times there are answers but many times there are not. So in the end we are faced with the question that Jesus once asked Peter and the other disciples: John 6:67: *You do not want to leave too, do you?* And in faith- with the Syro-Phoenician woman and with Peter we answer: *Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.*

In recent times I have not been as happy as I would have liked. But in all that I have faced and will face I still rejoice- because I know that my Redeemer lives and because "*In all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28).* Go in peace. Amen.