

What'd He Say? By Daniel H. Kuhn, Jr. 14060910
Proverbs 22:1-2, 8-9, 22-23, Mark 7:24-37
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What'd he say?

He said, "Ephphatha" The man couldn't hear Jesus. He was deaf and couldn't talk either.

What'd he say?

"He said, 'Ephphatha.'"

"What's that?"

"It means '*be opened*.'" It's a simple story of Jesus' healing ability. After Jesus touched him, the deaf man was able to hear and to speak.

The very important people of this story, though, are "they." Who were "they" "They" were the people who brought the deaf man to Jesus to be healed. "They" were people who had faith in Jesus' ability to heal. "They" were the people who persuaded the deaf man that Jesus could give him the gifts of hearing and speaking. "They" were the ones Jesus told not to tell anyone about his ability to heal. "They" were the ones who disobeyed Jesus' wishes, and spoke even more zealously about what Jesus could do.

Are you and I "they?" Can we have faith enough in Jesus to bring others here to encounter Jesus' healing touch? Can we persuade them of Jesus' ability to heal wounds of loneliness and doubt? Can we persuade them of Jesus' teachings of peace and non-retaliation, and of humility and love? For once, let's be "them."

Up there in the city of Tyre, what did Jesus say? He told a foreign woman that her daughter was not worth his time or his healing power.

"I don't believe it!" This is gentle Jesus, the one who loves and heals all?

He said, "Let the children be fed first (meaning the children of Israel), for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs."

We could make excuses for Jesus. He was tired of the crowds pressing around him, clamoring to be healed of this or that. He didn't want anyone to know he was in that house in Tyre, but the Syrophenician woman heard he was there, and begged him to heal her daughter. In his weariness and frustration, he told her he didn't want to bother.

That seems so unlike the Jesus we know. This was Jesus' first encounter with a non-Jew according to Mark's gospel. Furthermore, it was a woman making this request, and Jesus was still mourning the loss of his cousin John whose death had been ordered by another woman.

The Syrophenician woman was persistent. Today, we might call her a pushy woman. She argued with Jesus, "Even dogs get to eat crumbs."

Jesus was touched: He grew. He was opened! He saw the depth of the woman's faith. He healed her daughter.

That sounds strange to our ears, doesn't it? What'd he say? "Jesus grew." "He changed." We don't think in those terms. We thought Jesus was always kind and compassionate. Think about it though, Jesus didn't arrive in this world full blown as an adult ready to die on the cross. He came as a baby. He grew up among the people, and he learned their ways.

One of those ways was to stick to one's own kind. "Don't mingle with those foreigners." As he grew physically and mentally, he grew compassionately.

We too, are in the process of growing into Christian adulthood. It is a lifelong process. That

Syrophoenician woman with her pushiness helped Jesus see that all people are God's children, worthy of being healed and loved.

We are going to be making an important decision in the next hour about the future of this church. Will we be opened? We are going to vote on a vision statement prepared through a year's worth of listening and praying. Will we be able to see our mission as a church to the community beyond ourselves? Not just to ourselves, but to the people who have never come through the doors of this church. Will we be able to see ourselves as a spiritual center of a community? Will we be able to open our ears and hear? Can we work in collaboration with the university to touch lives more efficiently/powerfully.

Perhaps we need to be pushy. In this world of fear and terror and armed retaliation, we need to proclaim Jesus' healing touch. We need to preach his message of love of neighbor and enemy. We need to demonstrate God's love for all people.

Perhaps we need to be persistent in prayer. If you've prayed and you still feel needful, pray some more.

If you've prayed for world peace and it still hasn't come, pray some more.

Perhaps you have thought that you too, were unworthy of God's answer to your prayer. Nonsense. Take a cue from the Syrophoenician woman. Be pushy and persistent.

You are worthy. Feel yourself as worthy. Be persistent in your faith.

Let us pray. Jesus, heal us. Open our ears to hear your healing word. Amen.