

Reflection for the fifteenth Sunday in the season of Pentecost

Based on selected readings from Proverbs 22 and Mark 7-24-37

Offered by: the Rev. Liz Bowyer

On: September 6, 2015

Opening Prayer: Holy, gracious, and life giving God, may the words on my lips and the thoughts and feelings in our hearts, and minds, and bodies be acceptable in your sight this day. Amen.

I cannot imagine any more compelling readings from our scripture texts than what we have heard here this morning! They seem especially apt, given the changing landscape of the current humanitarian crisis in Europe dominating our heads and hearts, not to mention our TV screens and our computer monitors.

As governments in Western Europe respond to the needs of hundreds of thousands of refugees seeking asylum and hope, my heart is filled with gratitude for what feels like a tsunami kind of sea change in our world.

Even our own Canadian government seems to have been touched as its core. I see politicians shifting from rhetoric to action-based responses and promises. Responses and promises that could make a difference for thousands upon thousands of foreigners in need of our help as they flee persecution and terrorism in Syria, Iraq, and Iran.

And so, it on the Sunday morning in early September I find myself wondering:

Is God's vision of Shalom actually coming to pass here and now?

If that seems too idealistic, I wonder, "Would it be too brave to describe what we are seeing as a recognizable Spirit driven openness of heart, something not often seen or experienced on the global horizon?"

This brings me back to the two healing stories of foreigners found in Mark's gospel that Mary read for us this morning.

In the first story, Jesus finds himself in a geographically foreign and hostile territory in a region northwest of Galilee known as Tyre. While it's not clear from the reading what has brought Jesus here, he is clearly in need of a rest, there is no rest though.

When approached by a local woman, whose courage and faith motivates her to beg healing for her young daughter, we find ourselves face to face with what might be described as compassion fatigue. This should certainly be of no surprise given what Jesus has been up to so far in Mark's gospel!

As this morning's story continues, we learn that Jesus initially tries to put the woman off. His mandate, he says, is basically restricted to his own folk or kin, those he refers to as 'the children of Israel'.

Not deterred by this, the woman perseveres in pursuing what she needs for her daughter. Relying on the food metaphor, she goes on to remind Jesus that even her ilk, her kind, her people, too, are in need of sustenance. She tells him,

"Sir. Even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs" gets his full attention and ours, too.

In fact, so persuasive is her argument for inclusivity and healing, indeed, Jesus has a change of heart. Commending her faithful courage he tells her:

"...you may go, the demon has left your daughter." Miracle upon miracle, the woman goes home only to find that indeed, her daughter is healed.

From there we jump to the second story from Mark's gospel for this morning with Jesus and his disciples on the move yet again.

This time, though travelling closer to home, yet still in foreign territory, Jesus is sought out once again for healing purposes.

This time the healing request is made on behalf of hearing and speech impaired man.

Calling upon all his resources and upon God's help, Jesus works with the man to restore his senses and though the healing happens in a private venue which Jesus encourages be kept private, word travels fast. The story ends this way:

"..the more he ordered them to tell no one, the more zealously they proclaimed it.." and "all were astounded beyond measure."

Two more healing miracles offered back to back in our readings from the gospel according to Mark this morning.

Both stories lift up tenacity and risk: Of faith on the woman's behalf, and of hope on the part of those seeking restoration for the man with communication impairment.

These stories transcending geographic, social, political, and religious boundaries bring us back full circle to the current humanitarian crisis in Europe, one also transcending geographic, social, political, and religious boundaries!

A crisis of huge proportion that has somehow caught most of our attention and our hearts is also one that fills me with a sense of awe that God's in breaking vision of Shalom, God's coming reign, God's peaceable kingdom where the lion and lamb might lie down together is happening here and now online and in our conversations.

Thanks to the power of technology, we are able to share how this crisis is touching us as families, churches, and as whole communities in ways I have not seen before. At the same time, I am aware that we are called into the doing of more.

May we, like the woman in Mark's gospel, find ways of risking faithful and courageous questions and discovering how to break those geographic, social, political, and religious boundaries that separate us one from another.

In the name of compassion, leadership, and hope and for the sake of those families and children whose lives hang perilously in the balance as they wait and watch and wonder where tight restrictions on entry might be relaxed and where new homes and new life might be found, may it be so, amen.