

Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost
Year B
Mark 7: 24-37
September 5, 2021
All Saints Episcopal Church

Hope: The Virtue That Saves

She had HOPE!

Against all odds, She had hope!

One of the undergirding virtues of the Christian faith is hope!

With that said, it seems to be in very short supply these days;
at the very least, elusive.

You would have to look high and low to see its evidence in our news cycles and our conversations with friends and loved ones.

It seems we are all afraid to acknowledge that part of what makes our Christian faith so distinctive from all other religions; the belief in hope.

Hope.

It is a simple word.

Not difficult to say but very hard to imagine, I feel, especially in these times.

That is why this story in the Gospel of Mark, is so poignant today.

We are living in a hugely transformative time now with the ravaging affects of a global, viral pandemic moving like a tsunami wave across our planet. Not a single soul has been left untouched from the heartwrenching affects upon our present lives and futures.

If that wasn't bad enough, we have come face to face with another wave precipitated by global warming upon our earthly home. Everyday we watch its destructive affects with fires, floods and tornados wrecking havoc on our planet destroying the beauty that was gifted by God for us to enjoy fruitful and abundant lives.

But, she had hope!

This Syrophonician women had hope.

As we read just a moment ago, Jesus has traveled with his disciples to the region of Tyre, outside of Israelite Galilee, into Gentile territory presumably to find some refuge and rest as his healing ministry has become well known within the traditional Jewish communities.

However, his notoriety as a healer preceded him and he finds himself in the presence of a Syrophonician women seeking healing for her daughter.

We are presented with two things to consider here.

Firstly Jesus was a Jew, a reputed healer, an Israelite Holy man traveling with his disciples in Gentile territory.

The Syrophoenician women was a Gentile women, apparently alone without a husband to speak for her, engaging Jesus, a man outside of her family and culture, in a public place.

So, against this backdrop, the meeting and conversation between Jesus and the Gentile women would of been extraordinary; not seen and certainly not condoned in those times.

Therefore, we can assume some anxiety and trepidation on both their parts as they meet and converse regarding the healing of the women's daughter of an unclean spirit.

What strikes most 21st century's women's ears, however, is the rather crude response by Jesus to this women's request.

Even after she carefully prostrates herself before him, a common gesture of someone seeking favor in 1st century culture, she is rebuffed.

His denial, of what she so fervently wanted and desired with his words referring to her as a "dog", really smacks of someone who was cruel, judgemental and unjust.

Something not in character with the Jesus previously portrayed as a compassionate healer a few short passages before.

So, what does Mark want us to understand here?

Are we just seeing the very human side of Jesus, formed by his culture and religious identity?

NO!

What I believe we are seeing is a transformation. We are seeing the powerful transformation of both Jesus and the Syrophonecian women.

But what is significant is that the transformation is not initiated by Jesus, but quite the contrary, it is by the hope and resilience of the Syrophonecian women.

A surprising twist don't you think? To our ears and the ears of Mark's listeners too.

This transformation was initiated because the Gentile women, a women not far above a slave's value and outside of Jesus' class and culture, stepped up and acted on her faith in Jesus' healing powers.

Jesus's transformation only came after her bold and quick repute of his judgemental and disparaging remark about her position in society.

It was only when he is recognized the significance of her faith and hope in his powers in saving her daughters life, did he mercifully heal the child.

A powerful spiritual slap in the face don't you think!

Jesus woke up from his provincial Jewish worldview into God's worldview of His Kingdom.

The Syrophonician women's hope offered for Jesus a way out, a way to think beyond the mind that he once had, to a mind of mercy for those outside his culture and religion.

She opened his eyes and ears to what his mission would be going forward.

A mission of inclusion without regarding culture or class.

A mission that seeks equality for men and women.

The Syrophonician women's merciful and responsive actions reoriented Jesus' disparaging words while iluminating for the healer her value and worth as a person of faith and hope.

We are gifted with that insight to think outside the box, outside our provincial worldview, just as Jesus did, when we find ourselves close-minded in our judgements and less inclined to see the other persons perspective and value.

The Gentile women's direct response delivered her from Jesus' judgement and turned his actions into a blessing for her.

Her strength and resilience against all odds while fueled in the hope of Jesus' power gave her the gift of life for her daughter.

And that is the gift that we receive when we believe and trust that in our hope we can find healing and peace in the face of our diversity.

We are followers of Jesus, followers of The Way, and we learn by what these gospel lessons teach us.

We learn that, just as Jesus discovered, we can change our minds.

We can think outside of our fearful, judgemental, culture and religious orientations and look at the bigger picture.

The broader picture that God wants us to see and experience.

A picture that is inclusive of all cultures, races, and genders.

So, what does **hope** look like?

Hope is a fervant trust that all will be well.

Hope is inclusive.

Hope is merciful, compassionate and patient.

Hope is a promising source of rejuvenation.

Hope sustains us from sloth, presumption and despair. All of which contribute to words and actions that feed injustice.

Hope sustains us from tragedy and death.

Hope provides purpose to our lives.

Hope, most of all, helps us to pursue social justice with resilience and vitality.

Hope transcends our cynicism and disallusionment that is so prevalent today.

Hope is what sustains us from falling into pits of despair which leads us into unending feelings of unworthiness for ourselves and all of God's creation.

As I always say, “there is always hope”.

It is something I believe so, so strongly and I hope you do too.

Hope, while a simple word, is very powerful.

A vision in hope helps you to focus on the grace God gives us everyday even through the darkest days.

Hope expands our thoughts and ideas and brings our minds into a state of peace and love.

And that is all we can ever ask for!