



## The Great Divide – Touchpoint for September 1, 2021

### Mark 7: 24-37 (NIV) Jesus Honors a Syrophenician Woman's Faith

*<sup>24</sup> Jesus left that place and went to the vicinity of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know it; yet he could not keep his presence secret. <sup>25</sup> In fact, as soon as she heard about him, a woman whose little daughter was possessed by an impure spirit came and fell at his feet. <sup>26</sup> The woman was a Greek, born in Syrian Phoenicia. She*

*begged Jesus to drive the demon out of her daughter.*

*<sup>27</sup> “First let the children eat all they want,” he told her, “for it is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to the dogs.”*

*<sup>28</sup> “Lord,” she replied, “even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.”*

*<sup>29</sup> Then he told her, “For such a reply, you may go; the demon has left your daughter.”*

*<sup>30</sup> She went home and found her child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.*

### **Jesus Heals a Deaf and Mute Man**

*<sup>31</sup> Then Jesus left the vicinity of Tyre and went through Sidon, down to the Sea of Galilee and into the region of the Decapolis.<sup>[b]</sup> <sup>32</sup> There some people brought to him a man who was deaf and could hardly talk, and they begged Jesus to place his hand on him.*

*<sup>33</sup> After he took him aside, away from the crowd, Jesus put his fingers into the man’s ears. Then he spit and touched the man’s tongue. <sup>34</sup> He looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him, “Ephphatha!” (which means “Be opened!”). <sup>35</sup> At this, the man’s ears were opened, his tongue was loosened and he began to speak plainly.*

*<sup>36</sup> Jesus commanded them not to tell anyone. But the more he did so, the more they kept talking about it. <sup>37</sup> People were overwhelmed with amazement. “He has done everything well,” they said. “He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak.”*

### **Grace and Peace to you from the mystery in whom we live and move, and have our being.**

Let’s get one thing perfectly clear before we begin this Touchpoint... I am not a theologian. I am not Jim Hanson, Sheri Brown, Conrad Braaten, Henry Rojas, or any of the many educated and trained people who attend our Wednesday respite or regularly read these Touchpoints. Rather, I am someone who has been fortunate enough to have his spiritual journey enhanced by these mid-week encounters with the Word.

So what then do we make of this week’s passage with so much happening. We have miracles, plural, more than one. We have travel to multiple cities, gentile cities. We have interesting characters, including a woman who is either full of faith, tenaciousness, intelligence, resilience, or is she just a nuisance? And we have Jesus who appears to be tired, edgy, irritable... human!

“First let the children eat all they want,” he told her, “for it is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to the dogs.” This is Jesus’ response to a woman who is on her knees, begging for help, not for herself but for her daughter. I don’t know of many parents who would not do anything possible to help their ailing children. And here we have Jesus not just ignoring her, blowing her off, or pretending she doesn’t exist... no he takes the time to rudely address her, to associate her with the dogs. It reminds me of the lyrics in the Bruce Hornsby song, The Way It Is:

*Standing in line, marking time,  
Waiting for the welfare dime.*

*'Cause they can't buy a job  
The man in the silk suit hurries by  
As he catches the poor old ladies' eyes  
Just for fun he says, "get a job"*

This is not the Jesus I like. This is not the Jesus I want. I want the Jesus in the pictures from my Sunday School classes... you know... kneeling with the children, holding a lamb, piercing blue eyes. Alternatively, I am OK with strong Jesus. Standing in the boat to calm the storm, telling his disciple to put away his sword in Gethsemane, or turning over the tables at the synagogue. I am also fine with humble Jesus, philosophical Jesus or parable telling Jesus. But this cranky Jesus is not what I signed up for.

But as I have learned from listening to so many Wednesday Touchpoints, read the verses before and after. Because it is easy to take one verse and use it to meet a certain narrative and that has often been done to create a divide in us as a people. We take one verse, or one sentence, or one segment of a discussion and use it to create an us/them dynamic. That is done in business, politics, and in religion.

The division is very real. Some say that our country has never been more divided than it is now. I don't know about that. I wasn't around during the civil war, but by all accounts when tens of thousands are fighting to the death, there is extreme division. I was just a kid in the late 60's when protesters were being killed by police, so I am too young to compare that divide to this one. But I know that where we are at today as a country is not healthy, and may not be sustainable. I can say the same for the church. By all accounts it is not healthy, and may not be sustainable.

So how do we begin to narrow this divide? It's a question that has been asked and analyzed by people way smarter than I. And given that this didn't happen overnight, it is certainly not going to be repaired overnight. Yet, we need to start somewhere.

When I was going through some really difficult times in my life and I looked to others for help, my first reaction was to point out the flaws and differences in each of those who were trying to help. Finally, someone suggested that I look for similarities rather than differences. Look for what could help instead of what I felt was flawed logic. Look for how parts of their story might match my own. It was an amazing change in perspective. Once I actively looked for things that made others similar to me, rather than different than me, I was naturally more open to listening.

So how can that be applied to where we are today? I think if we can start with how Jesus answered the question of which of commandment was the most important. "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is "Love your neighbor as yourself."

Not a bad starting point. Then, I might suggest finding a common denominator that applies to every person, everywhere in the world, and that is that we are all children of God. If I am looking at myself as a child of God and I look at you as a child of God, then I love my neighbor as myself, it might give us all a starting point of healing and reconciliation from anything that divides us.

As Jesus was able to look at his disciples as they were denying, betraying, and running away from him and still see them as children of God and he shared the meal with them as a way of re-connecting. As a way of uniting in the face of division. We too are now invited to this table to re-connect and unite with ALL.

Oh ya, I almost forgot... what happens when we read the verse following, “for it is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to the dogs”

“Lord,” the women replies, “even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.”

Then Jesus told her, “For such a reply, you may go; the demon has left your daughter.”

She went home and found her child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.

So now as we go forward, I ask two things of you:

1. Go into the world, knowing you are a child of God, loving your neighbor, and bring peace and hope to those around you
2. Pray, pray really hard for Jim to have a speedy recovery and to resume his rightful place leading and challenging us each week because this is not nearly as easy as he makes it look.

**Amen.**

# *Spirit in the Desert*

## **Opening Songs**

### **Be Still**

(The London Fox Taize Choir, Remember Me)

Be Still, know that I am God

### **Creator Spirit, Come**

(Keith Duke, Sacred Weave)

Creator Spirit, Come. Renew the face of the earth.  
Kindling Spirit, Come. Enflame our waiting hearts.  
Anointing Spirit, Come. Pour forth on us anew.

## **Bible Passage**

*(A passage takes us from one place to another)*

## **Touchpoint**

*(Where God's story touches our life story)*

### **Hallelujah**

(Jeff Buckley)

Now I've heard there was a secret chord  
That David played, and it pleased the Lord  
But you don't really care for music, do you?  
It goes like this, the fourth, the fifth  
The minor falls, the major lifts  
The baffled king composing Hallelujah

Hallelujah, Hallelujah  
Hallelujah, Hallelujah

## **The Meal**

### **Lord's Prayer**

(The London Fox Taize Choir)

## **Benediction**

### **A Blessing**

(Margaret Rizza, Kevin Mayhew Ltd. Complete Chants Vol.1)

May the Lord bless you.  
May the Lord protect you and guide you.  
May His strength uphold you.  
His light shine upon you.  
His peace surround you.  
His love enfold you.  
May the Lord bless you.