

Sermon for Pentecost 16 – September 9<sup>th</sup>, 2018  
Pastor Russell Britton

Isaiah 35:4-7a

*4 Say to those who are of a fearful heart, "Be strong, do not fear! Here is your God. He will come with vengeance, with terrible recompense. He will come and save you." 5 Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; 6 then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy. For waters shall break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert; 7 the burning sand shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water; the haunt of jackals shall become a swamp, the grass shall become reeds and rushes.*

James 2:1-10, [11-13], 14-17

*1 My brothers and sisters, do you with your acts of favoritism really believe in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ? 2 For if a person with gold rings and in fine clothes comes into your assembly, and if a poor person in dirty clothes also comes in, 3 and if you take notice of the one wearing the fine clothes and say, "Have a seat here, please," while to the one who is poor you say, "Stand there," or, "Sit at my feet," 4 have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts? 5 Listen, my beloved brothers and sisters. Has not God chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom that he has promised to those who love him? 6 But you have dishonored the poor. Is it not the rich who oppress you? Is it not they who drag you into court? 7 Is it not they who blaspheme the excellent name that was invoked over you? 8 You do well if you really fulfill the royal law according to the scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." 9 But if you show partiality, you commit sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. 10 For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it. 11 For the one who said, "You shall not commit adultery," also said, "You shall not murder." Now if you do not commit adultery but if you murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. 12 So speak and so act as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty. 13 For judgment will be without mercy to anyone who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment. 14 What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? 15 If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill," and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? 17 So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.*

Mark 7:24-37

*24 From there he set out and went away to the region of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know he was there. Yet he could not escape notice, 25 but a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately heard about him, and she came and bowed down at his feet. 26 Now the woman was a Gentile, of Syrophenician origin. She begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. 27 He said to her, "Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." 28 But she answered him, "Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." 29 Then he said to her, "For saying that, you may go—the demon has left your daughter." 30 So she went home, found the child lying on the bed, and the demon gone. 31 Then he returned from the region of Tyre, and went by way of Sidon towards the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis. 32 They brought to him a deaf man who had an impediment in his speech; and they begged him to lay his hand on him. 33 He took him aside in private, away from the crowd, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spat and touched his tongue. 34 Then looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, "Ephphatha," that is, "Be opened." 35 And immediately his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. 36 Then Jesus ordered them to tell no one; but the more he ordered them, the more zealously they proclaimed it. 37 They were astounded beyond measure, saying, "He has done everything well; he even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak."*

Children's Perspective: We all want to be capable but really. Society in its folly of favor blankets us with 'champion,' 'best of the best,' and 'world's greatest \_\_\_\_.' What if people had shirts that said 'just another player on the team' or 'world's okayest athlete?' Slightly amended Hemingway quote: "There is no nobility in being superior to your fellow human, only in being superior to your former self."

### *Wanna Get Away*

All of us have times that a change of scenery would be helpful - maybe to get away from a stressor or to relax. Jesus in this text is trying to get away but it doesn't seem to pan out. His *expectation* is relaxation but reputation is vexation as her determination for Jesus' healing as revelation is indication of incarnation. He's so good at what he is doing vis a vis God's work that word gets ahead of him and people are reaching out to him. It's worth noting that these are 'outsiders' who are reaching out to him. Not the chosen people Israelites. And we just heard from James don't show favoritism but then - in a rare instance really - Jesus gets a little snarky with the woman asking on behalf of her daughter. But before we move onward let's talk a little about 'favoritism.' You all do know the Bible was not written in English right? So the word is actually *prosopolempsia*.<sup>1</sup> It more literally means 'taking face.' And as I thought about this the context of being a parent informed those times when we take a child's head gently in our hands and have them face us... or perhaps more powerfully when a *child* takes our adult disposition to distraction, especially in an era of devices, and asks us to focus. Attention as a commodity is well to reflect upon how deliberately you are aware of where you are focused.

Why does Jesus challenge the woman? Different theories include testing her or earnestly posing an argument of proper order to see how she would respond. Because it isn't her faith in Jesus Christ as God that is ultimately commended but rather her clearly ardent and persistent belief that he CAN heal her daughter. This perspective affords some scholars to offer that this isn't about faith but about God's radical abundant extension of healing. The adequacy of but a crumb from the feast contains the fullness of healing. Who of us is content with a crumb? (Kind

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=3774](https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=3774)

of makes me ponder whether a more scant communion distribution method today might be apropos.)

Then we have the particularly staggering story of the deaf and mute man healed who THEN is told don't tell others about what just happened. Does that strike anyone else as unfair? A liberation that you can't live into?

So in light of those Gospel stories the tension that I've lived this week through considering that Jesus TRAVELS to extend these healings is the role of coming/going/staying. Any of which can be faithful but many of which tend to have sociological implications. Particularly a book which was brought to my attention called Staying is the New Going by Allan Briggs. I guess it basically calls one to consider the ubiquitous aphorism *onward and upward* and whether it has merit. It would seem some folks really earnestly need to be told, "Don't just stand there, do something!" while others certainly need to be told, "Don't keep doing something, stand there!" In our lives of faith how good is our discernment about activity and the absence thereof and to what end.

I guess good people much is tumbling in thinking. In the coming weeks the book of James is going to call out faith and its relationship with **activity**. Specifically, James makes the case that faith without deeds (works) is no good. What is it of faith by itself that makes it possible as an asset?!

May you have eyes and ears to see in the story what the story makes visible in you. May your thoughts of feast be made to consider where crumbs are true nourishment. This rally day fasten your proverbial seat belt because God has made us to be expectant. Look out the windows on your faith journey. And when our expectations are confounded or challenged, may we look under the table and see there's enough to keep going. Amen.