

Elizabeth Peter  
 Phinney Ridge  
 September 9, 2018  
 Pentecost 16 Year B  
 Mark 7:24-37

## Grace like a Hummingbird

I've been in Seattle for three weeks now. I got to explore a little bit, meet new people, eat some delicious food, and worship in many different churches.

Needless to say, I am excited to be here. So excited that I just wanted to start. Coming all the way from the East Coast I wanted to jump right into internship. I wanted to hit the ground running and start doing what I feel called to do....but the problem was I still had like a whole week of waiting. After so much planning and moving I finally had arrived at THE Phinney Ridge!

And the thing is, I knew I needed to just rest, to rest physically before starting, to rest spiritually in being away from those I love, to rest mentally coming from an exhausting summer.

And to rest, I like to watch birds. I am a bird watcher.

*And I am very obedient to Jesus who said in Matthew 6 to "Look at the birds of the air" - it's a commandment you know....to watch birds. And im a seminarian so i do what im told...*

and I love to watch hummingbirds  
 I am no bird expert....

I just enjoy their presence.

Especially Grace. Grace is the name of the hummingbird that visits me everyday. Grace doesn't shy away cause I am outside near the feeder, she is often curious and flies about two feet from my face fluttering her wings like a mini helicopter - just hovering and eyeing me up.

I often **hear her** before I **see her**, and I'm not really sure where to look. I kind of always surprise myself at how genuinely happy I get when she visits me.

And when I hear her I know I have to look, like I have to find where she is because I honestly don't know the next time I'll see her. See her spectacular presence completely overcome my attention.

I named her Grace because she reminds me of God's Grace.

“Legends say that hummingbirds float free of time, carrying our hopes for love, joy and celebration. The hummingbird's delicate grace reminds us that life is rich, beauty is everywhere, every personal connection has meaning and that laughter is life’s sweetest creation.”<sup>1</sup>

*I think this may be one reason why Jesus tells us...to pay attention to the birds...just sayin’*

See She captivates me. And each morning I know she will be there but there is always that chance that I will miss seeing her.

There is always a chance that I’ll see her, but I can’t unless I pause to rest. Amazing things happen when we stop to rest. Physically, spiritually, mentally. And i love it when Jesus rests in the bible, because I know that it’s a precursor to something in the bible that will challenge me.

So Jesus tries to go rest. He went away , entered a house, and did not want anyone to know he was there.

And in enters the Syrophoenician Woman.

I’ve been thinking a lot about the her in the story. Not a major character, and definitely not a minor one. Yet, she gives us a powerful witness... And for me it comes down to just a few words:

“She fell to her knees”

I’ve thought a lot about that... this desperate need to save her daughter that she literally falls to her knees. And the gospel writer of Mark does not give us much description, all he tells us is that the woman's daughter had an unclean spirit. That She was overcome with a demon.

This Jesus is her one chance. She had heard about him, Heard the rumors of the man who calls himself the messiah, who can heal people, who interacts with the rejects of society.

She **heard** him first. And then she **saw** him.

Now this may be her last chance to save her daughter.

She had three things going against her- she was a woman, a gentile, and her daughter was overcome by a demon so she was dirty.

Jesus was most likely tired... probably just wanted some alone time like he so often does in the gospels. And when he goes to be away from people and rest, there she is. Right in front of him. Probably the last person he expected to see.

---

<sup>1</sup> Unknown author. Grocery store card.

And then she begs him to cast the demon out of her daughter.

She falls to her feet.

And Jesus says something that makes me really uncomfortable...

He tells her to pretty much wait her turn. Let the children be fed first. The children being the Jews, for it would not be fair to take their food and throw it to the dogs.

Being called a dog is not a compliment. And this may be one of those situations where we needed to hear Jesus' tone of voice to get if maybe this was a joke or he smiled at the end or he put an LOL at the end of his sentence. But the insult, is still there and it stings.

This metaphor was a common insult. It was what people thought of when they thought of the Jews and the Gentiles. This term was not uncommon in rabbinic speech.<sup>2</sup> just like we have insults in our society that we throw at people.

And that's probably what makes me feel so uncomfortable. because an everyday prejudice just came out of Jesus' mouth. For a split second we see a human reaction,

And his words are not all messiah like and inviting.

It's exclusive

It's insulting

It's throwing back at the reader the prejudices that come out of our own mouths and minds and Jesus is the one saying it.

And it's uncomfortable.

All I want is to move onto the next part of the story to where he heals a deaf man and does this cool miracle telling him to be opened and he can hear!

But I think the gospel writer of Mark didn't want us to move on too quickly. He wanted us to sit in the uncomfortability of the words that Jesus said.

To confront the prejudices we have about who is an outsider and who is an insider?

To connect us with this very human response and very human Jesus in front of us.

---

<sup>2</sup> Edwards, James R. 2001. *The Gospel according to Mark*. Grand Rapids, Mich : Leicester, England: Eerdmans. 219.

That this mini parable that Jesus speaks is a direct challenge to us to open our hearts and minds to who may be right in front of our faces.

Jesus was culturally conditioned to say this, and she disrupts all the ways of looking at insiders and outsiders.

this woman was literally on her knees prostrating herself out to him giving him all that she was.

nevertheless she persisted...

She understood something about Jesus that the disciples didn't get for like six Sundays in our lectionary.

She understood that Jesus was the bread of life, truly bread, and that if she got the crumbs, that it would be more than enough.

She shows her understanding and acceptance of Israel's privilege, and the purpose of the Messiah.<sup>3</sup>

To trust in Jesus and the abundance he offers holding to faith that there is more than enough grace for Israel, for her and for her people.

Talk about demanding a seat at the table...

It's really cool that we can find within the story a character who is filled with such wonder and boldness to confront the limits of the kingdom. To push the boundaries. She holds onto faith even when denied by Jesus himself. She reminds us that salvation is offered to everyone. That grace is for everyone. That healing and wholeness is for everyone.

And what I find most powerful about this story is that Jesus not only heals this woman's daughter but he sees her.

And Jesus sees us...sees us for who we really are.

If we have the right answer or not

If we have faith or not

Jesus sees us

And one of those ways is when we fall to our knees. Together. Around the communion table. Holding our hands out to get so much more than the crumbs.

---

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 221

Because Jesus gives us all of him. There are no more insiders or outsiders. Just **hungry** people.

(pause)

So when we take communion today, I invite you to look around at those kneeling on your left and your right. Across and around.

Notice them. See them.

And recognize the gift given to us from the Bread of life.

**Hear** the words of grace in “This is the body of Christ given for you”

**And See** the people who make up the body of Christ around you -

Together we rest in the promises of love and forgiveness given to us freely.

Because when we take the time to rest, amazing things fly into our lives.

Amen.