

# “Open to Grow”

September 9th, 2018  
Mark 7: 24-37

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This fall our worship services will have an over-arching theme called **Good to Grow**. The challenge of growing in our faith is part of the DNA of the Kingdom of God. It doesn't matter if you've been a Christian for 70 years or 7 days — our following and our fellowship should change us. More and more, we should be becoming the people God created us to be.

In today's Bible story, a desperate woman asks Jesus to help her, and the disciples try to shoo her away. Jesus is in another country, and another region. He's in Tyre, which is way to the north along the Mediterranean coast. The text says that he didn't want anyone to know he was there. (I almost wonder if he was there because he figured no one would recognize him —maybe he needed a break!) It's not easy being famous. It's not easy being a successful healer ... there was not a lot of down time in those 3 years of his ministry.

Whatever his intentions were on this visit to Tyre, word got out, and a woman whose daughter was very ill knew this was her chance. Except that at every turn her path was blocked and the door was closed. Even, at first, by Jesus himself.

The woman is Greek, she's from Tyre and she's a gentile — she's not Jewish. In that day and age for devout Jews she has three strikes against her: she's a woman, she's a foreigner and she's a gentile. All three of those were reasons not to associate with her. Jesus and the disciples were well within the law of their religion to ask her to leave.

So the disciples try to shoo her away (shooing seems to be in their DNA — remember when they try to shoo the children?) but she's desperate and she won't be shoo'd. Somehow she gains an audience with Jesus, and begs him to heal her daughter. This is what he says 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.”* The children are the children of Israel, and she was outside that fold and therefore no better than a dog. In this moment, Jesus closes the door on this outsider. Not what we expect from Jesus.

Still he's Jesus, he's the one who breaks the rules, and colours outside the lines to bring the grace and the power of God to everyone ... but on this occasion he nearly misses the boat.

But the woman has nothing to lose. If she is angry and offended at the insult, she doesn't show it. She doesn't respond in anger, but neither

does she back down. The power difference between Jesus and the woman is huge, but that does not stop her from speaking her truth — and that changes everything.

I just want to pause in the story to point out that when we are in a conflict situation, we so often move to the natural ‘fight or flight’ instinct. I don’t know how I would have reacted in that situation. Depending on the day I likely would either have told Jesus where he could shove his healing halo and stormed out, or I would have run away in tears with those internal voices yet again reminding me what a failure I was and how I don’t belong. Fight or flight! We are trapped when we think the only ways through conflict are win-lose. When you go into a conflict situation, pray that your eyes will be opened to the third way.

I don’t know where the desperate woman found her words in that moment ... actually, that’s not true — I *do* know. I am sure that in that moment God gave her wisdom that would open the door and open Jesus’ eyes and mind.

“*Sir,*” she replied to Jesus, “*even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.*” Instead of being angry or running away in tears, she responds in great humility and great strength, and it changes everything. Genuine humility has no place for ego — it’s not “all about me” but it’s not “poor me” either. It is courageous and strong.

It catches Jesus off guard, and I believe it changes Jesus mind.

How is that possible? Isn’t Jesus fully divine? Doesn’t Jesus know everything? Doesn’t this suggest that Jesus was not perfect? Before you run out the door to a better Bible-believing church, hear me out! I think the answer to these questions is “Yes, and.”

Jesus was fully divine — and we also believe that he was fully human. How exactly does that paradox of fully-fully play out? I really don’t know, but I do hold on to a verse earlier in Luke that says: “*And Jesus matured, growing up in both body and spirit, blessed by both God and people.*” (Luke 2:52 The Message).

Jesus was born into a particular time and place and he grew in body and in spirit. He didn’t suddenly appear on earth as a perfect full-grown God disguised like a human. He started very, very small — a newborn baby—and he grew. He really was human and as a human he had to grow. He had to learn that fire was hot and that his mother would be very disappointed when he didn’t tell her where he was. He grew in normal human ways, but also in the ways of the Spirit. That was part of the reason he went to the wilderness to be tempted before his ministry began. I believe that as a human, Jesus went on growing. I believe *this conversation for*

*Jesus was a moment of growth, and that in that moment his eyes and his heart were opened. “For saying that, you may go—the demon has left your daughter.” So, she went home, found the child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.*

Growing is part of the DNA of the Kingdom of God. It’s all through the Bible if you look: from the small tiny nation of Israel to Jesus and his little band of disciples, to the early church which began to grow and spread. From mustard seeds to huge trees, the kingdom of God starts small and it grows. It grows physically but it also grows in understanding and in purpose.

From Tyre Jesus went to Sidon, which is a little farther north, and in Sidon he heals a man who is deaf and mute. The word he uses to heal the man is this: *Ephaphtha* – be opened. With that word the man’s tongue is freed to speak and sing and his ears are opened to hear the sound of the birds singing and the children playing in the road. With that opening, he can now participate in community fully.

*Ephaphtha: be opened.* The key to growing is being open to grow. Where do we need to be opened? Where have our beliefs and our ways of doing things gotten stuck and been closed?

This week the news has been flooded with the Nike decision to feature Colin Kaepernick for their 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary ‘Just Do It’ campaign. In case you’ve missed this week’s news or make a habit of avoiding it (I don’t blame you); Kaepernick is the U.S. Football Player who started the ‘take the knee protest’ during the playing of the national anthem to protest how black people in the United States are treated.

I read a back story to this whole controversy that I liked, and I thought I’d share it.

Aug. 14, 2016- Colin Kaepernick sits for the national anthem .....and no one noticed.

Aug. 20th, 2016- Kaepernick again sits, and again, no one noticed.

Aug. 26th, 2016- Kaepernick sits and this time he is met with a level of vitriol unseen against an athlete. Even the future President of the United States took shots at him while on the campaign trail. Kaepernick went on to explain his protest had NOTHING to do with the military, but he felt it hard to stand for a flag that didn't treat people of colour fairly.

Then on on Aug. 30th, 2016 Nate Boyer, a former Army Green Beret turned NFL long snapper, penned an open letter to Kaepernick in the Army Times. In it he expressed how Kaepernick's sitting affected him.

In his letter, Mr. Boyer writes:

*"I'm not judging you for standing up for what you believe in. It's your*

*inalienable right. What you are doing takes a lot of courage, and I'd be lying if I said I knew what it was like to walk around in your shoes. I've never had to deal with prejudice because of the colour of my skin, and for me to say I can relate to what you've gone through is as ignorant as someone who's never been in a combat zone telling me they understand what it's like to go to war.*

*Even though my initial reaction to your protest was one of anger, I'm trying to listen to what you're saying and why you're doing it."*

*Mr. Boyer goes on to write "There are already plenty people fighting fire with fire, and it's just not helping anyone or anything. So I'm just going to keep listening, with an open mind. I look forward to the day you're inspired to once again stand during our national anthem. I'll be standing right there next to you."*

Boyer didn't fully agree but he was open to listen to what Kaepernick was saying in his protest. Kaepernick in turn was able to listen and was open to hearing what Boyer had to say. Listening and being open to the other side are rare qualities today.

Kaepernick invited Boyer to San Diego where the two had a 90 minute discussion, *and Boyer proposed Kaepernick kneel instead of sit.*



But why kneel? In a military funeral, after the flag is taken off the casket of the fallen military member, it is smartly folded 13 times and then presented to the parents, spouse or child of the fallen member by a fellow service member while KNEELING. The two decided that kneeling for the flag would symbolize his reverence for those that paid the ultimate sacrifice, while still allowing Kaepernick to peacefully protest the injustices he saw.



Wouldn't the U.S. be different right now if more people were like Kaepernick and Boyer? Wouldn't our world be a better place if all humans were a little more open to listen to something they don't quite understand?

Jesus starts by turning down a woman from Tyre, but

he changes his mind to the point where later on he holds up the faith of 'those other people' as a model and a warning to his own people. *"Woe to you Bethsaida! For if the deeds of power done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I tell you on the day of judgement it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon than for you."*

Jesus welcomes us in, and invites us to change and to grow and to be opened. Ephaphtha! If Jesus could have his mind opened and continue to grow in his ministry, how much more do we need to continue to grow in mind, in body and in our faith?

Our mission at this church has three parts:

- 1) **Radical hospitality:** God loves ALL. So do we.
- 2) **Transforming Relationship:** Coming into a relationship with Jesus, and also with other people, changes us.
- 3) **Making a difference:** Having been loved and changed, we go out and in small mustard-seed ways, we help to love and change the community and the world.

I hope you join me on this life-changing adventure!

Thanks be to God. Amen.