

Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost

A GREAT, NON-HOSTILE, MERCIFUL, TAKEOVER

Mark 7:24-37

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Analysis by Cathy Lessmann

24From 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, 25but a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately heard about him, and she came and bowed down at his feet. 26Now the woman was a Gentile, of Syrophoenician origin. She begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. 27He 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." 28But she answered him, "Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." 29Then he said to her, "For saying that, you may go – the demon has left your daughter." 30So she went home, found the child lying on the bed, and the demon gone. 31Then he returned from the region of Tyre, and went by way of Sidon towards the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis. 32They brought to him a deaf man who had an impediment in his speech; and they begged him to lay his hand on him. 33He took him aside in private, away from the crowd, and put his fingers in his ears, and he spat and touched his tongue. 34Then looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, "Ephphatha," that is, "Be opened." 35And immediately his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. 36Then Jesus ordered them to tell no one; but the more he ordered them, the more zealously they proclaimed it. 37They were

astounded beyond measure, saying, “He even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak.”

DIAGNOSIS: Under Hostile Control

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *Multiply Condemned*

The two characters in this pericope have been determined by Jewish authorities to be outside the children-of-God box and so suffer rejection and ostracism. Why? The Syrophonecian's daughter is gentile, female, and possessed by a demon (v. 26). [In Mark, to be demon possessed was to be controlled by an outside, alien power.] The deaf/mute is physically handicapped and also gentile (v. 32). His inability to communicate has made him valueless to society, a reject. Even Jesus bluntly suggests that their status is as low as a dog's [a description used occasionally by Jewish writers of the time.] How often do we interpret some malady or differentness about others to indicate that God has rejected them, and that because they don't fit into our box, they must also be outside God's box? (We may even impose these expectations on ourselves—finding ourselves unacceptable to ourselves and God.) And how often do we reject the seriousness of “possession,” assuming that it only refers to (possibly, at worse) alcoholism or drug addiction (which makes it easy for us to point fingers), and so fail to recognize other more insidious but definitely ungodly forces that can possess and destroy us, such as materialism, individualism, nationalism, and other -isms?

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Under Hostile Ownership*

We can only imagine the pain and aloneness, the helplessness these two must have felt. In fact, it could be that they don't

approach Jesus themselves because they have succumbed to and accepted their society's verdict of them, believing that their implicit "worthlessness" is the final truth—God's truth too. There is nothing they can do to change that and they can't shake the forces that control them. As helpless rejects, even God must not care about them (or so the reasoning goes).

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Destroyed by/with Hostile Powers*

The tragedy of being controlled by other powers, (let's call them other "rulers") is that those rulers are life-less and incapable of giving life. In fact, they are diabolos, meaning, wreckers, destroyers of life. On the cosmic level, a "hostile takeover" has occurred. God has "lost" these individuals to diabolos rulers, and their end is indeed complete destruction.

PROGNOSIS: Under Merciful Control

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *A Merciful, Costly Takeover*

How fortunate that the little girl and the deaf man have emissaries (a mother, friends) who approach Jesus on their behalf begging for their healing (vv. 26, 32). But how much more fortunate are they that the one to whom these emissaries appeal is Jesus, who just happens to be on Almighty God's (his Father's) "overt operation" of reclaiming lost creatures/creation. This overt operation will be another cosmic takeover, but this time, a most merciful one, and it will involve a very public execution and a spectacular resurrection. Indeed, in this merciful takeover the "Kingdom of God" does come "with great power" (9:1)!

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *Under New Ownership/Management*

It is impressive that the mother and friends recognize that Jesus was the one who could change reality for their loved ones

and come begging to him (vv. 25, 32). Even when Jesus treats the mother rudely, she remains tenacious, and her doggedness impresses him (vv. 28-29). Both she and the friends convey a sure confidence (let's call it faith) that Jesus is capable of reversing the daughter's and the deaf-mute's fates. Notice that none of the parties has any special credentials that qualify them for such merciful interception, it is simply granted because they come to Jesus, and trust him. We too, with our paucity of credentials, appeal to Jesus for mercy, already trusting (because we've heard of and believe "the spectacular rescue-mission") that we will receive it too.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Multiply Blessed*

And so, without even uttering a word, and from a distance, Jesus heals the Syrophoenician's daughter. She is found resting peacefully in bed, her turmoil over (vv. 29-30), a sure sign that her old possessor is gone. Jesus then continues with a healing ritual over the deaf-mute, and he too is healed and rejoins the community (vv. 33-35). Likewise the friends are changed: They are so amazed they just can't keep their mouths shut about Jesus (vv. 36-37). Those who have been relieved of their alien rulers react the same way today, telling others about Jesus and urging trust in Him. When such trust happens, then healing of every kind—also called salvation—inevitably follows.