

Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost

BE OPEN

Mark 7:24-37

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Analysis by Cathy Lessmann

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, but a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately heard about him, and she came and bowed down at his feet. Now the woman was a Gentile, of Syrophenician origin. She begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. 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." But she answered him, "Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." Then he said to her, "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. 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. They brought to him a deaf man who had an impediment in his speech; and they begged him to lay his hand on him. He took him aside in private, away from the crowd, and put his fingers in his ears, and he spat and touched his tongue. Then looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, "Ephphatha," that is, "Be opened." And immediately his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. Then Jesus ordered them to tell no one; but the more he ordered them, the more zealously they proclaimed it. They were astounded

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

DIAGNOSIS: Closed

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *Closed Up/Out*

The Syrophenician’s daughter was shut out of and by society, not only because of her demon-possession, but also because she was Gentile (vv.25, 26). The deaf/speech-impaired man was shut out of the community because he couldn’t communicate (v. 32). Both suffered maladies that not only shut them out of the community, but, (as if a giant “Quarantine” sign had been posted over them), closed them in on themselves.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Self-Trusters*

The act of shutting out “undesirables” is a two-pronged act of judgment: Undesirables are judged unworthy, no-counts, discardable, and at the same time their judges and rejecters endow themselves with “acceptability.” This societal-based acceptability turns rejecters into self-trusters.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Closed Up/Out for Good*

But self-trusters find the tables turned on them by the Judge who has a soft heart for rejects. When such self-trusters come knocking, they find the Pearly Gates (life forever where God lives) shut, closed and barred to them-from the inside, while they remain out! Worse yet, self-trusters are closed in (imprisoned), quarantined, in that eternal realm where God does not live. It’s hell.

PROGNOSIS: Ephphatha! Be Opened

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *“Ephphatha!” Be*

Open

The surprising Judge-who-loves-rejects shows that He loves also the rejecters when He sends Jesus who offers the Kingdom of God to everyone, rejects and rejecters alike. He does this through his Son, Jesus, who is quarantined at Golgotha (the place where sinners/outcasts go), shut down (killed) by authorities who render him unacceptable, and he is closed up/in in hell. Jesus does all this to reveal God's way of springing the latch and releasing the real prisoners.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *Jesus-Trusters*

The Syrophenician woman recognized Jesus as God's great "hell-opener," and she doggedly pursued him with her trust. He was so impressed with her faith, that he answered her pleadings and healed her daughter. So also he listens to the uncommon concern of the deaf/speech-impaired man's friends. They too trusted Jesus to heal their friend, and because their trust was in Jesus (as opposed to themselves or any other possible "savior"), He did as they asked. The bottom line: faith in Jesus opens everything that has been closed: ears, tongues, spirits, even hell!

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Open for Business*

Jesus-trusters act like the deaf man's kindly friends: they just can't keep their mouths shut. Something has happened to them. Because they've been "sprung loose," they open up about Jesus and to others. They are open to other people's needs and they can openly tell the truth about themselves and their Rescuer. In fact, they become downright zealous, telling the world all about Jesus and how the closed in and unacceptable have a place with God through him (vv. 36, 37).