**BCM Bible Study – Sept. 29/30, 2021**

**Mark 7:1-8:26**

*Last week’s challenge: Find a way to reflect Jesus’s compassion by meeting someone else’s needs, even if it requires you to sacrifice something.*

**True Holiness**

**Read Mark 7:1-13**

* What traditions does your family have? (What do you do on holidays? Vacations?)
* By Jesus’s day, the Jews had compiled a list of rituals they believed they had to abide by to remain pure. These rituals originated from the levitical system that God established in the Old Testament. **Read Exodus 30:19-21 and Numbers 18:8-13**. How are these rules and regulations similar and different from those mentioned in Mark?
* **Read Leviticus 19:2** Why did the Pharisees create these extra rules for the people?
  + *Initially, they believed holiness was for the whole land and wanted to make God’s law understandable and practical for lay people to follow.*
  + In the same way, we create traditions, rituals, and rules in the church. What traditions have you noticed in the church? How do they benefit Christians?
* Unfortunately, good intentions sometimes go awry. How did the “traditions of the elders” harm the Jews’ faith and outreach?
  + In what ways might we unintentionally communicate to others that they are ‘dirty’ or unfit for contact with us?
  + How have personal or church traditions interfered with your (or others’) ability to follow God?

**Read Mark 7:14-23**

* What is Jesus’s point in this passage?
  + *Defilement begins within the heart, not outside the body, which means external acts of purity are not enough.* Why is this concept hard to hear?
* If our hearts are the problem, what is the remedy for the sinful conditions listed?
  + *See John 3:3 and Ezekiel 36:26-27*
  + What does being born again and receiving a new heart actually mean? How can you explain it in a way that an unbeliever could understand?

**Reaching the Gentiles**

**Read Mark 7:24-30**

* What was your initial reaction to Jesus’s response to the woman’s request for help? Were you shocked? Offended? Why?
* Akin translates the woman’s response this way, ““Yes, Lord, we are all dogs under the table with no rights whatsoever as members of the family. I acknowledge I don’t deserve a place at the table, but I believe there is enough even for me on the table! Just a few crumbs will be enough. That I believe” (161). What stands out to you in this response?
  + Do you tend to struggle more with the fact that you do not deserve God’s blessing or that He has plenty to offer you? Why?
  + How can you be both bold and humble in your prayers?

**Read Mark 8:1-10**

* Jesus performs another miraculous feeding, but this time in Gentile territory. Why is this significant?
  + *“Jesus is not simply ‘a redeemer, a messiah like Moses and David’; he is the Redeemer, offering redemption to more than just the people of Israel.”* *(Garland, 307)*
  + This would have been shocking to the Jews of the time because they hated Gentiles. What types of people are you tempted to exclude in the same way?
  + How can you reach out to those people instead of holding them at arms’ length?

**Spiritual Blindness**

**Read Mark 8:11-21**

* How does Jesus respond to the Pharisees? How does He respond to the disciples?
* The Pharisees and disciples are both spiritually blind, but Jesus responds differently to them. Why? What is different between the disciples’ and the Pharisees’ blindness?
  + *The Pharisees are already against Jesus. They have decided not to believe Jesus regardless of any evidence He may present. In contrast, the disciples want to understand. Garland quotes Geddert, another commentator, to explain it this way, “Followers, however dull and unfaithful, are patiently instructed. If they follow all along the way Jesus leads, they will eventually be transformed from mere ‘data-collectors’ into ‘meaning-discerners.’ It all hinges on the decision for or against Jesus”* (312). What do you think of this quote?
  + In what ways have you approached Jesus or others like the Pharisees?
  + How can you approach them like a disciple instead?

**Read Mark 8:22-26**

* How is this miracle different from the ones we have read about so far in Mark?
  + *Jesus heals in stages*
* The blind man’s friends asked Jesus to touch their friend, likely because they had heard that Jesus healed instantly through His touch. Jesus heals their friend, but not in the way they expected. What does this teach us about the way God works?
  + How have assumptions about the way God works interfered with your or someone else's faith?
  + How has God opened your eyes to new possibilities in the past?
* Many commentators believe that this healing foreshadows “the spiritual healing of the disciples’ sight” (Garland). If that is the case, what does it teach about spiritual growth?
  + Do you find the idea of gradual spiritual growth frustrating or encouraging? Why?

**Conclusion**

Throughout this section of Mark, Jesus repeatedly challenges assumptions and forces us to confront our pride. Continue this process this week by doing one of the options below:

1. Examine your personal “rituals” to determine how they help or hinder your walk with God
2. Do something to connect with or learn from a person or group that you tend to avoid
3. Reflect on the ways your pride or assumptions are hindering your relationship with God

**Extra Notes**

* Hand washing was a Jewish standard of purity (Garland).
* The Levitical system established the idea that uncleanness separates man from God. As a result, Jewish Rabbis created and collected traditions, including those specifying when and how to wash one’s hands, in the *Mishnah* to define cleanness (Garland).
* In Jewish tradition, honoring parents included providing physical necessities. Thus, claiming those physical resources were Corban, or set aside for God, was a subtle way of avoiding that responsibility.
* The Syrophoenician woman was a Gentile pagan from the Tyre/Sidon area on the coast. This area was extremely wealthy and often took advantage of the poorer Galileans nearby. There are many Old Testament prophecies that condemn Tyre (Isa 23; Jer 47:4; Ezek 26-28; Joel 3:4; Amos 1:9, Zech 9:2) (Akin, Garland).
* There are many conflicting opinions on why Jesus responds to the Syrophoenician woman the way He does, but here are some important points to consider:
  + “First” means Jesus is telling the woman to wait, not that He will never help her or the Gentiles (Rom 1:16, 2:9-10).
  + Many commentators highlight that the word Jesus used for “dogs” refers to indoor pets/puppies rather than wild animals on the streets (Akin, Hughes). Thus, Jesus’s response demonstrates more care and respect than the Jews normally displayed towards Gentile women. However, it still conveys that Jesus was prioritizing the Jews at that time, which would have been insulting (Garland).
  + Hughes argues that Jesus was merely testing the woman in order to display her faith. He supports this view using the parallel account in Matthew 15:21-28, in which Jesus expresses His amazement over her faith.
  + Garland argues that Jesus intentionally placed a stumbling block in the woman’s path in order to test her humility. By confronting her with the concept that God chose to bless the Jews first, Jesus forced her to either explain her worth, argue the unfairness of God’s blessing distribution, or humbly appeal to His mercy.
* Jesus potentially spent 8 months (almost ⅓ of His ministry) in Gentile territory (Hughes).
* For the sake of time, I did not dive into Mark 7:31-37. However, some of the themes from that passage include the necessity of depending on God through prayer, serving others for God rather than public attention, and allowing compassion to drive your actions.
* The region of Decapolis (where Mark 7:31-8:10 occurs) is a Gentile region (Hughes).
* Some commentators claim that the feeding of the 4,000 is just an extra account of the feeding of the 5,000. However, there are too many differences between the two miracles for this to be the case. Their similarities merely highlight how God often uses repetition to help us learn and grow (Hughes).
* The Pharisees’ demand for a sign presented a temptation for Jesus to take the easy way out. They wanted Jesus to remove the need for faith by giving them a sign they could not deny (Hughes).
* “A sign from heaven” is redundant because all valid signs should be from heaven. As a result, Garland argues that the Pharisees likely wanted an apocalyptic sign that God was about to unleash His wrath on Israel’s enemies. They wanted Jesus to conform to their ideal Messiah rather than God’s Messiah.