

Mark 7:24-30

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.

The Church's Love Is a Mother's Love

There are not enough words that anyone can say that can fully express how thankful I am to my mother...and I would bet that a lot of you out there feel the same. And you mothers of young children **be patient**; your children probably don't appreciate you as much as they should right now, but there's a good chance that one day they will. I was not a very appreciative son. In fact my mother might have thought at times that I was possessed by a demon, or maybe a legion of demons. I got into my fair share of trouble, and I lied and I concealed and I quite often but not always got caught, and despite whatever bad I had done, despite whatever frustration and agony I had wrought upon Mom she would still cook my favorite chicken and rice, she'd still wash, dry and fold my clothes, and change the sheets on my bed, and, well, just about everything. And I don't know how long it took me to appreciate all of her patience, all of her labors, all of her care and attention. And I believe that many of you are that kind of mother or you HAVE or HAD that kind of mother.

And just as I can only summarize the wonderful things that my mother did for me, I believe that this story that we just read hardly even scratches the surface of the amount of work that this mother must have done for her poor daughter. Certain things are obvious:

She finds Jesus even though Jesus did not want to be found, so she must have worked extra hard to find out where he was. She's of a different culture and religion than Jesus, so she had to leave her comfort zone to speak to him, AND she's speaking to a man alone, without having her husband with her, which was both bold and could be seen as scandalous. In that place and time she could have been physically punished for doing what she did. And when Jesus puts her down – calls her a dog – and refuses to help, THIS MOTHER DOESN'T BACK DOWN. She takes the insult, brushes it off, and doesn't go away until she gets what she needs for her daughter. All this is obvious from the text and from a basic understanding of what Middle Eastern culture was like two thousand years ago.

But what about everything that the text does not tell us? How long was this woman's daughter suffering from this "demon," and what were the symptoms? Was she having seizures, and how regularly? Did this woman have other children that she had to care for even as she was tending to this daughter? And what other challenges might she have faced? Was her husband able to provide adequately for the family? Did her husband treat her respectfully or was he abusive? How about her parents? Were they alive and did they require care as well? As I think about the mothers who are here today I ask the same questions about you. What multitude of issues might you be dealing with, and how do you manage?

And I really respect you, because if there's one lesson that mother's have learned it's about **caring for others first**. A mother will give all she has and risk all that she has for her children. There's a story in the Old Testament about a mother whose baby is stolen by another woman because her child died in the middle of the night, so both women come to King Solomon claiming that this baby is theirs, and "wise" King Solomon says, "Cut the baby in half and give each woman half." At this point the real mother says, "No, don't do that" and shows she's willing to surrender her child to the other woman rather than having the child killed. "Wise" King Solomon recognizes that the true mother was the woman who was willing to give up the child to save the child's life. That lesson may show how wise King Solomon was, but the greater lesson is just how loving a mother is

– she would suffer separation from her own child rather than see harm come to him.

That same care for others, that same love and self-sacrifice that so defines a good mother also defines a good church. Of course we have our own needs – building maintenance and utility bills – but our hearts should be turned outward, to the people around us and the people in our community. We want people who come to have a great time in worship; we want the children who come to experience God's love and learn about God's love in Sunday School; we want to offer support and consolation to the people here who are going through trials, and we want to reach out in love and care to those who never come here. You've heard it said that the Church is the Body of Christ. Today I used prayers and liturgies that depict God as Mother rather than Father. Well think of the Church as a mother, and all people are her sons and daughters. Some of them are prodigal sons and daughters, but everyone is a child of God, and so everyone is in need of God's love.

Particularly those who feel unloved. Who are they? Well, anyone who is treated as somehow less deserving, less privileged, less "worthy" will feel less loved. Anyone who is told, "You can't do this because you're a BLANK." Whoever feels that they are a BLANK is in particular need of God's love. They need to be told that they are important, that they are beautiful as they are, and that they are just as precious in God's eyes and in our eyes as anyone else. Because when people are *affirmed* they can *excel*. Do you remember the movie "Forrest Gump"? It was clear from the beginning that Forrest was not the sharpest tool in the shed, but his mother loved him and cherished him and made him realize that he was special. And, yes, there was some luck that helped Forrest to achieve great things, but much of his success had to do with his own integrity and determination, and that was something his mother instilled in him. Well there are a lot of people out there who could use some love, and the church can provide them with that love. We can show them that they matter, that they are loved and cherished by God and by us. We can affirm them, and they can excel. May this church continue to be a good mother to folks both inside and outside these walls.