

Sermon TMI: “Be Bold and Be Opened!”**Bible: Mark 7:24-37**

When: on the 16th Sunday after Pentecost, September 8, 2024

Where: about 25 people (plus YouTube Live Streaming viewers) at Gilroy UMC

Opening Prayer

O Lord, let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts, be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock, and our Redeemer. Amen.

1. When God is Silent (When Jesus is on Vacation)

According to today’s scripture reading, it seems like Jesus needed a rest and tried to take a vacation in a foreign area. The passage, “Jesus went away to the region of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know he was there,” suggests this idea. In Jesus’ time, the region of Tyre was in a Gentile territory, where Jews usually did not travel. And Jesus wanted to have a Sabbath or vacation from the crowd. Probably, what he was hoping for was no more visitations, no more phone calls, and no more emails from the disciples and the crowd.

Because Jesus was fully human, Jesus wanted to have a vacation from his ministry and his work. This makes sense, right?

How about God? If Jesus was fully divine, can God have a vacation? Can God take a rest? Can God be absent or silent? Have you felt that God was on vacation when you needed God? Have you felt that God was only silent or absent when you needed God? Have you felt that God was not there for you? You might feel that God was there for others, but not for you.

Have you had these moments in your lives?

This happened to a foreign mother whose daughter was in need. It might have been even worse than God's silence, because she faced Jesus' refusal. When this Gentile woman begged Jesus to heal her daughter, Jesus answered, "Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." At this moment, Jesus was not silent, but Jesus might have been saying, "It is not for you, but for others." If you were this woman, how would you respond to Jesus' refusal? Would you dare to confront Jesus? Would you be bold enough to challenge Jesus?

2. Be Bold!

In our history and in our church history, there has been discrimination and glass ceilings. Because of the color of one's skin, because of gender identity, because of racial and ethnic origin, because of age and disability, our ancestors, our friends, and we have experienced these barriers: visible and invisible, clear and vague, individual and systemic. Unfortunately, these barriers have been there even in the name of God. And occasionally, very unfortunately, we internalize these barriers and prejudices as the image of God. These could be some examples: "Because I am a woman, God does not call me to be a pastor," "Because I am not white, I need to choose only certain jobs," "Because I have an accent in English, I need to serve only a Korean-speaking congregation." These inner voices can be so powerful that they can sound like God's voice, just like Jesus' refusal to help the foreign woman. Then, can we dare to challenge God's voice inside us?

Jesus was fully human, he who was on the earth, who lived like us, who spoke like us, and who thought like us. Jesus was also fully divine, he who was beyond our world, who created us, who loved us, and who saved us! The woman saw this fully divine Jesus as well as the fully human Jesus. She was bold to challenge Jesus! She knew that there was discrimination in her society, and she knew there was also God's abundant love and overflowing grace. And she knew that change would be possible little by little, not all in one night. She saw God's grace and love even through the children's crumbs under the table. This is not easy, but it is possible, when we see God's divine presence even through our limitations. It is not easy but it is possible, when we see God beyond our small understanding of God.

3. Be Opened!

After this story, there is another story of healing. Some people brought a deaf man to Jesus. We do not know exactly from the Bible whether they were Gentiles or not, but probably, they were Gentiles, because Jesus was in Gentile territory where Jews did not travel at that time. In both stories, the daughter and the deaf man did not approach Jesus. Her mother was there, and his friends were there. They were not alone. They had families and friends who loved and cared for them. So, they could be opened to Jesus' healing.

Being opened does not mean that you are dependent. To ask for help does not mean that you are weak. Of course, we need to maintain our privacy and boundaries. But please remember that your families and your friends will be there for you when you need help. Please remember that our church will be there for you. When you feel that God is not there for you,

please remember us. We love you and we care for you. I know that we have limitations, and we cannot help you with everything. However, we have the mind and heart of Jesus Christ who is compassionate! We are the body of Jesus Christ. When you suffer, we all suffer together. When you celebrate, we all rejoice together. Being opened sounds passive and vulnerable, but it is a very bold action! It might enable us to hear what we have not heard, to speak what we have not spoken, and to see what we have not seen before.

3. Messianic Secret?

There is a very interesting ending in today's passage. Jesus ordered those he had helped not to tell anyone. This is a part of the so-called Messianic secret. Several times Jesus commanded those who he healed not to tell anyone. Why? There are many theories about this secret, and I would like to share two popular reasons first. The first explanation is to avoid the misunderstanding about Jesus the Messiah. Jesus heals the sick, but the healing ministry is not the main one. Jesus' main ministry is his way to the cross and death. The second one is to avoid the unnecessary attention from the Roman authorities at that time. Jesus' ministry, movement, and popularity, could be a threat to the Roman authorities, which might hinder Jesus from doing his ministries.

And my understanding is similar to the ethos of HIPAA, the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act. It is to protect and respect those who were healed. Doctors do not have the right to share the patients' medical information, even though they help the patients. Nurses do not have the right. Insurance companies do not have the right. Only the patients

have the right to share their own information! The mother might want to speak on behalf of her daughter. The friends might want to speak on behalf of their friend. But Jesus wanted to keep it a secret, because he wanted to respect and protect the daughter and the deaf man. Being bold and being opened means being vulnerable. No one wants to be a subject of gossip. To Jesus, those who were healed were more important than anything else: more than his fame, his ministry, the mother and the friends' joy! And Jesus might have wanted to wait until the daughter and the deaf man wanted to share their joy and their stories by themselves. This is just my two cents on the Messianic Secret.

Be bold and be opened! I hope that we, our church, will have many and more holy secrets of what God has done through us!

Closing Prayer

Loving and living God, when we feel alone, please lead us to be together. When we feel lost, please send us your angels. When we feel your absence and silence, please help us to see our families, friends, and our church members. Be with us with your holy and secret presence! In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.