

**September 6 2015 Year B Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost
Newport United Church of Christ**

Scripture Lessons ~

Psalm 146

James 2:14-17

Mark 7:24-30

Sermon *It's OK to Change Your Mind*

Today's Gospel lesson from Mark is, at least in my opinion, one of the most serious, one of the most tricky, one of the most controversial passages concerning Jesus and his work in the world, I think, in all of the New Testament. No matter what I say today is not going to wrap itself up into a neat little package for any of us. I am bound to tick somebody off in the process. But then again as I said last week, Jesus spent a good deal of his ministry ticking off the established religious leaders of his day, calling into question the neat little packages in which they had tied up God. This event in Mark's Gospel follows right on the heels of last week's story where Jesus confronted the Pharisees about the role of hand washing in the lives of his people of faith. And then it seemed as though, he needed to take off to one of his retreats, to be alone. In this case Jesus goes way off the beaten path, far north, beyond the regions of his native Galilee, to the area around the city of Tyre, in what would be today the modern coast of Lebanon, clearly Gentile territory, and clearly out of Jesus usual zone of ministry. It is unclear as what Jesus is doing in the house in question in this story. What is happening, did he have some kind of premonition of what he needed to do with the people inside. We really don't know but it is clear that he intended to sneak in unnoticed. Maybe he catches his breath. We just don't know and yet one image clearly emerges outside of Jesus usual ministry. A Gentile, a person of that region of Tyre and on top of it all, a woman approaches Jesus. He had a great track record as most of us know, compared with the rest of the culture of his day, as to where women were concerned. And to be in this close proximity to a Gentile woman at the time could spell trouble for Jesus ministry. It would like one of us being dropped suddenly into to a strange neighborhood like in Los Angeles, California or Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, would be completely outside our zone of comfort. That is one of the issues in this passage, for me at least, Jesus seems to have a comfort zone in this passage, too. You remember time and time again he was pulled aside in the Gospel and was begged to heal almost anybody and he does so. But here he not only hesitates, he seems to display some sort of deep-seated prejudice and not only refuses but what I would call a racist barb –a barb that implies that he shouldn't be wasting time on Gentiles but focusing instead on fellow Jew's in what he is doing. It sounds

heartless. Not like the compassionate Jesus that any of us are used to. One version of the story is that Jesus' mission was only to be to his fellow Jews and he is justified in treating this woman in this way. My take on it is this, Jesus is human and he was subject and vulnerable to all prejudices we are and in this case the same prejudices that the people had at that time as well.

When I was growing up in Colfax, there was one African-American family in town. One and only one, the father of the family was working on one the hydroelectric dams on the Snake River at the time. On one hand I had some exposure to the family in my church. On the other hand there was some bad exposure in parts of our town and the other half of my family where the N-word or phrases like "those people over there" were prominent and common. Prejudices are part of human nature, we all know that, but it has to be taught and then it has to be reinforced in the process but the good news is that after we are old enough to know better we can be snapped out of our old engrained mold, our old engrained prejudices. In the story, the Gentiles woman desperate to get healing for her daughter, she doesn't take Jesus' approach lying down. Instead she tartly replies in essence even Gentiles are human beings created by God and entitled to God's love and God's care which leads me to my point. Jesus it appears to repent and turns from his former attitude and immediately heals the little girl then and there with no discussion, no argument and no hesitation. He seems to have changed his mind on the spot. And my point is this some stories in scripture are meant to instruct us by showing us that the characters get it right; others teach us based on the characters get it completely wrong. Yet Jesus is the one that we intend to follow in this life. The message today is a powerful message indeed. Jesus got it wrong for a few seconds. He caught himself and he made it right. He changed his mind and love in one process. If Jesus can do it right, who are you and I to at least try to get it right in the course of our lives.

Sometimes scripture comforts us, other times it is put there to make us question our ideas; other times it is there to challenge us; other times is to make us very uncomfortable and cause us to squirm a little bit in our seat, too. Today I think, Jesus is challenging us to reconsider our ideas about "those other people out there" for whoever those other people are for us. Each of us has someone or some group of "that other group of people". And then to be willing, to be willing to look at things differently and to act in a different way to let love win in the course of our ministry in the world. Because it is Ok, it is Ok; it is really Ok to change your mind.

Together we say AMEN