

Mark 7: 24-37 'Desperate'

In the backyard of our old house on Springvale Road Glen Waverley was a huge wattle tree. Biggest wattle tree I'd ever seen. Well one of the branches was getting a bit too close to the house so I decided I needed to cut it down. So I put up the extension ladder, which only just reached to the branch. I then climbed up with my electric chain saw and the rather long extension lead. So I begin chain sawing this branch...it was about [] big. Just as I get through the branch, it drops to the ground – but I didn't count on the weight of wattle. Apparently wattle wood is very dense and heavy. So as the branch drops to the ground, the stumpy bit that the ladder is on goes up and the ladder falls to the ground. I manage to wrap one arm around the stumpy branch – and here I am 6 or so metres in the air, chain saw in one hand and clinging on for dear life. I desperately call out to Joy who I know is in the house somewhere.....she doesn't hear. I think – well at least I can lower the chain saw down to the ground on the extension cord – which I do – but I'm still desperately up this tree. I think Joy's not coming – what will I do? Underneath me is a small shrub – and I think desperately, well I suppose it might break my fall – so in true Bruce Willis style I drop down and manage to survive, just a bit scratched.

Our passage today contains desperate people. A desperate women and some desperate friends. Firstly a women desperate for Jesus.

Jesus you'll remember has been talking about what really makes people sinful – not ritual defilement – like ceremonial hand washing and the traditions of the Pharisees, but what is inside us. And Jesus is unafraid of ritual defilement – in our passage he heads off to the region of Tyre – outside Jewish territory – this is gentile land again. In fact Mark deliberately makes the point that she is a Gentile of syrophoenecian origin – from the region of Syria.. Jesus unafraid to be in gentile territory.

Jesus enters a house and doesn't want anyone to know he was there. As an aside, perhaps that's because of the trouble with the Pharisees – but we know from 6:31 he has been trying to get some rest – the pressure to constantly do healings and to speak to people was overwhelming. I think indicating how Jesus is

fully human – needing to rest. Is it not great that we have a saviour who knows what tiredness is and what constant pressure is like and the need to rest.

But he can't escape notice, for here is a woman desperate for Jesus to heal her daughter. She bows at his feet showing deep respect. She begs Jesus to cast the demon out. But she is a gentile, very clearly a gentile, and Jesus words seem a bit harsh to us, 'Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs'. Doesn't sound like Jesus – calling a woman a dog!

But I think Jesus is drawing her faith out. In the Greek world there were many so called miracle workers – is this woman really desperate for Jesus to do something or is she just treating him like another miracle worker? Well, firstly there are two words for dog in Greek – one that refers to street dogs or wild dogs and one that refers to puppies or house pets. This is the word Jesus uses here – like puppy – or house dog – almost a term of endearment – like I might call Joy my little kitty cat – not that I would! Also did you notice Jesus says, 'let the children be fed FIRST' – he's not saying never.

I mean as a second aside, it is true that God's plan for salvation for humanity came through the Jews. Yet God chose Abraham, in order that Israel might become a light to the nations. God preserved the people of Israel, that through David might come the messiah for all. The gospel is first preached in synagogues and then in the market places. God sticks to his plan. He deliberately picked a weak and small people to work through, so that his power might be made known.

But in any case, the woman takes no offence at what Jesus says, for she is desperate for the healing. 'Sir, she answers, or Lord, she answers, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs.' In humility and trust she puts herself under Jesus Lordship. Either knowingly or not, she recognises the plan of God for salvation. And Jesus does the exorcism without going or laying hands on or even seeing the daughter – extraordinary power. A woman desperate for Jesus.

You may not need your daughter exorcised, but how desperate are you for Jesus. Do you get how you were lost in your sins and it is only in Jesus you have forgiveness. Do you know your own lack of

righteousness and know that he is your only source of justification. In a world of chaos and mess, do you hold onto Jesus in control. In a world where love so often seems half hearted and weak, do you grasp the depth of his love. In a church of ups and downs of great blessings and annoying frustrations, do you trust him as Lord of the church. As you face times of suffering and pain, do you hold onto his promise of a new body and that he will wipe away every tear from our eyes. Even as you face death one day, will you trust him with your death, knowing he has gone before and has risen and ascended and is seated at the right hand of our heavenly Father.

Do we know how lost we are without him? How desperate are you for Jesus?

The other night we watched again the remake of Casino Royal – you know the James Bond movie. At the end of the movie the girl is trapped in a lift in Venice, the building is collapsing, sinking in to the canal – imagine the scene – fast shots, dramatic action, Bond desperately trying to open the lift, gun fire all around, explosions all around, dust and fire, dodging the bullets, diving into the water... He is desperate to rescue her.

How desperate are you to rescue your friends? In the second part of our reading, Jesus returned from the region of Tyre. Why he goes by Sidon, which is North before heading south no one knows. But he's back in the region of the Decapolis where there were sizeable Jewish colonies. And some friends desperately bring a deaf man with a speech impediment. A whole group of people bringing one of their friends. Again, they beg him to lay his hand on him.

Jesus takes the man aside – remember he doesn't want to spend his life as a miracle worker or healer. And he does these funny actions, fingers in ears, spitting and touching tongue, looking up to heaven, sighing and then be opened. In the previous demon casting out, Jesus didn't even go to see the girl. Here, why all this rigmarole? I think again, he is drawing the man's faith out. Perhaps miming what he is going to do. I'm going to deal with your ears and tongue – and spit was known to have healing properties. And he is healed.

But Mark wants us to get more than just physical hearing and healing out of this story. The word used here for ‘impediment in his speech’ is rare. It occurs only here and in Isaiah 35. In Isaiah 35 we hear, ‘Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy.’

In Isaiah, these things happen when God comes. When God comes and restores his people, so people will hear and see. Not just physically – but spiritually – we’ll see that next week as we look at the healing of the blind man as well. Remember Jesus finishes the parable of the sower with the words, ‘Let anyone with ears to hear listen!’

While the friends are desperate for their mate to hear again, Mark is desperate for us to see Jesus who is God come to earth, the one through whom we hear the words of God. Mark is desperate for us his readers to hear and respond to Jesus.

How much do you want your friends to become Christians? Scale of 1 to 10 – 10 I’d do anything for them to know Christ. 1 – I never think about it, I just like being a Christian myself. How desperate are you for your friends to hear the gospel? How keen are you for your friends to know Jesus? How much do you want them be healed of their deafness and to hear clearly the words of eternal life? How desperate are you for your friends to come and join our church? How desperate are you for your family members to know Jesus and belong to a church?

A couple of years ago my father started having TIA strokes – little mini strokes – settled down now – but it seemed touch and go for a while there. At the same time my mother was diagnosed with lymphoma cancer. I thought – oh no – I could have no parents within a couple of years. Now I had talked to them a number of times about Christianity – I would love them to be Christians – I have prayed for them often - but nothing has happened. So on the advice of a friend I wrote them a letter – nothing else seemed to work – I sat down and wrote a 5 page letter, explaining why I believed in Christianity and why I thought they should believe it – for I am desperate for them to hear and believe – please pray for them.

Desperate for Jesus, desperate for our friends and family and following on from that, passionate for Jesus.

I of course have been passionate about many things in my life. Passionate for Essendon – you should have seen me moping around church last Sunday night after they lost. Passionate for my wife. Passionate for my children. Passionate to pass exams. Passionate for good wine. Passionate for Jazz music. Passionate for church growth. Passionate for the people in our church. And....passionate for Jesus.

At the end of the reading, the people, it says, ‘were astounded beyond measure, saying, ‘he has done everything well; he even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak.’ Jesus makes no mistakes. As soon as Jesus says the words ‘be opened’ - Immediately his ears were opened. As soon as he says the words – the demon has left your daughter – that is what happened – exorcism at a distance. The people are passionate – ‘he has done all things well’.

You see, I could stand up here and keep encouraging you or badgering you to share your faith. I could stand up here and try and motivate you to be excited by our church with visions and directions and goals and aims. I could stand up here and ask you to make up our giving short fall and encourage you to tithe and to give sacrificially.

But you know if we are passionate for Jesus all those things will happen anyway. For if we are passionate about Jesus we will be sharing our faith – whether we are introverts’ or extroverts, know all the answers to tough questions or are brand new Christians. If you’re excited by Jesus you’ll be talking about him. If you’re passionate about Jesus you’ll be passionate for his church. If you’re passionate for Jesus you’ll give to his church naturally. If you’re passionate about Jesus you will serve his church without being asked.

Desperate for Jesus. Desperate for our friends. Passionate for Jesus. Astounded beyond measure. ‘He has done everything well.’