**Stowe Sermon Mark 7 : 24 – end 8th Sept 24**

In the service so far we have thought about how ‘with God all things are possible’ Matt 19:26, and our Gospel reading today illustrates the amazing healing power of Jesus.

Firstly, it is important to explain where these events in Mark took place; the region of Tyre and Sidon. This area was not Jewish, Jesus is in Gentile territory. And it is significant that this passage in Mark comes directly after Jesus challenges the Jewish ideas of being clean and unclean by saying that is sin that makes a person unclean, not certain foods or failing to follow certain laws etc. Next Jesus is found among the gentiles, the unclean people if you like in the eyes of the Jews.

And Jesus is approached by a gentile woman who seeks His healing for her child. And Jesus reply, especially how it is translated into English is not easy to understand, for he says the children must eat first and their food should not be given to the dogs. It is important to say that the word Jesus used, which translates into English as dog, is actually a term of affection a bit like a cute pet lap dog, so He is not being rude here. What Jesus is saying is that he has come to spiritually feed God’s children ie the Jewish people. In Matthew’s account of the same incident Jesus explains that He was ‘sent only to the lost sheep of Israel’ – His earthly ministry was to the Jews, God’s chosen people. But He then send them out to spread His message of salvation to everyone.

The woman then replies saying but even the cute lap dogs can eat the crumbs under the table. It is such an incredible response – the woman’s humility is remarkable. She acknowledges that she isn’t Jewish and probably doesn’t worship the one true God, but she asks for crumbs from under the table. Her love for her child and her faith in Jesus shine through. She isn’t saying I am Jewish like you, I worship God and I deserve this, she is in effect saying I don’t deserve this but help me anyway out of your goodness. She has faith in Jesus.

The Jews believed that their standing with God was based on their Jewish ethnicity and how well they obeyed the many laws, but this woman admits she is not Jewish and does not obey their laws AND asks Jesus to help her, through faith and humility. And Jesus replies that her daughter has been healed because of her faith. This shows so much about the salvation Jesus brings – Jew or gentile, man or woman, we are saved by His grace and not our ‘religious merit’ or good deeds.

Next we hear that Jesus returns to Galilee and the crowd bring Him a man who cannot hear and who has trouble speaking, and they ask Jesus to heal Him. Jesus takes the man away from the crowd – it is a one on one interaction, which feels very personal, perhaps tender. Jesus relates to the man as an individual, just like He relates to us individually. And Jesus heals him, such a miracle and truly life changing for the man.

The way that Jesus heals him is interesting too, because Jesus used significant actions – an outward visible sign of the internal miracle that was occurring – he put his fingers in the man’s ears and spat on his own finger then touched the man’s tongue , and then He looked to heaven, to God His father. For it is only God who heals Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Mark concludes with the words ‘He had done all things well’ the same words as we find in Genesis 1:31 when God looked at His creation and it was well. When Jesus heals our bodies and our souls He restores creation and brings us back to be what God originally intended us to be.

For God as St Paul writes in Ephesians ‘is able to do immeasurably more than we all ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever, Amen’ Ephesians 3:20-21