

Can't stay silent
Mark 7:24-37

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God is good. *Response – All the time.*
All the time. *Response - God is good.*
How did that feel? (*ask for responses*)

I wanted to start this way because in our gospel, we have two stories of the power of people speaking. It is not our tradition to speak up during church or to say 'amen' or 'preach it sister' during the sermon. When I go to other churches, I do enjoy chiming in with an Amen or some other response to the preacher. I find there is something in letting my spoken word respond to the words I am hearing. There is a certain power to it. However, we have our own ways of speaking up in church.

Think about how we began our worship – Blessed be God Father Son and Holy Spirit. and the *response – And blessed be God's kingdom, now and forever. Amen.*
Also, think about the beginning of our Eucharistic prayer:
The Lord be with you *Response – And also with you*
Lift up your hearts – *Response – We lift them up to the Lord.*

That is our way of bringing our voice to worship and sometimes, I wonder if we control our responses too much. But let's see what these stories have to teach us.

The first story is about a woman coming to Jesus wanting him to heal her daughter. There are lots of road blocks in her way. Jesus has come to Tyre which is mainly a Gentile town most likely to get away. After all, the reading says that he doesn't want anyone to know he is there. Well, people found out including the woman and she gets past whatever barriers might have been in the way. Also, the woman is Syrophenician– a Gentile so she shouldn't be coming to Jesus, a Jewish man. And if that wasn't enough, she is a woman and should have a man to speak for her. None of this stops her. She believes that Jesus can help her daughter and she is determined.

She goes to Jesus and begs for help and Jesus is very rude and basically calls her a dog. Talk about being fully human. There are lots of theories about what was going on with Jesus that day. Maybe he was tired. Maybe he thought she was a rich Gentile woman who just assumed she could get whatever she wanted. Whatever the case, Jesus' response does not stop or silence her. Her daughter is in great need and she must speak up. She responds – yes lord but even the dogs eat the crumbs from the children's table. And Jesus says, for saying that you may go. The demon has left your daughter. The power of her words are amazing. She changes Jesus' mind. She simply could not stay silent.

The second story is of deaf man who cannot speak well. "They" bring him to Jesus and "they" beg Jesus to help him. We don't know who the "they" are, but Jesus takes the man aside away from the crowds and heals him. Jesus tells them not to tell anyone, but

they cannot help themselves. They proclaim the wonder of what Jesus has done. The more Jesus tells them to be quiet, the more they proclaim his good works. They like the woman can simply not stay silent.

These stories led me to ponder about how we are being called to speak up. When are those times where we speak up to help or defend someone? When are those times where we can simply not stay silent, but must proclaim God's goodness and power? What gets in the way of us speaking up?

I remember being afraid to speak up in school when my friends were making fun of another girl in our class. I had been the one made fun of in the past, and didn't want to go back to that status so I stayed quiet.

I remember having an experience of God at a silent retreat many years ago and the joy I felt. The following week, I found myself smiling at work – like smiling all day long. I wanted to share my experience, but I stayed silent because one doesn't not talk about those things at work.

So much can get in the way of us speaking up, when God needs us to talk. Think about all the times when you have not said anything when you knew you needed to or when you wanted to. Now think about all those times when you did speak up. When a co-worker did a hurtful thing back when I was a scientist, I was honest and let her know that she had hurt me. I may not have talked much about my experience of being at that retreat when it happened, but I have shared that story with many throughout my ministry as a priest and even last week with an atheist friend at my gym.

There are times when we are too afraid to speak up and there are times when we can simply not stay silent. Think about those times where you could not stay silent and let them encourage you for the next time. Stay close to our amazing God, because when God is with you, the urge to speak gets even stronger. God needs our voices in this world – at school, at work, at home, in government and when we are just out and about.

As we celebrate this Gathering Sunday, as you greet those you have not seen much of this summer, as you go back to school and back to work, think about how will you speak to and for the goodness of our God.

God is good. *Response – All the time.*

All the time. *Response - God is good.*

Amen.