

**Proper 18**  
**Year B**  
**Sixteenth Sunday After Pentecost**

Proverbs 22:1-2, 8-9, 22-23

Psalm 125

James 2:1-10, [11-13], 14-17

Mark 7:24-37

+++ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

He left the comfort of his homeland. He has been busy preaching and teaching among those who know him and his family. He's been doing things that disquiet or discomfort people even as he brings God's healing love into their lives in tangible ways, healing, exorcising demons, and feeding thousands.

Not only does he leave, he heads to a part of the world that he's heard about through the prophets' teachings and condemnations—Tyre, Sidon, the Decapolis. Places predominately Gentile, somewhat wealthier than his hometown.

We don't know why Jesus goes away to a place where he will be an outsider. Perhaps he is looking for some rest.

Or a place to let out a big sigh of exhaustion, relief, or further exploration of what his ministry is to be.

Perhaps he just needs a place to be unknown for a while.

But being unknown isn't in the cards for him.

The Syrophenician woman, a Greek, Gentile clearly heard about his ability to heal and she seeks him out. She finds him, in the place he hadn't wanted to be known, and she makes an appeal—not for herself, but for her daughter. Jesus' response is far from what we expect—it's rude. We've seen him be open to this point—graciously responding to requests for healing—responding to people like himself.

Jesus doesn't deny the woman outright even in his rudeness. He tells her that his own people will be healed first. Not good enough. That answer isn't good enough for the woman who persists in getting what her daughter needs. She makes a theological argument against Jesus—the crumbs under the table—God's love for all, includes her daughter. God's healing power is for her daughter, just as much as it is for those who are Jewish.

Some theologians see this conversation as a turning point in Jesus' ministry. He understands what her challenge means. The woman's daughter is healed. The woman's persistence leads Jesus to recognize that his ministry is to bring God's love beyond the borders of religion or race.

Jesus' hesitation to heal the woman's daughter and his limiting view of his ministry are shattered in a place where he has ventured as a stranger. They are shattered by someone unlike himself and unlikely to meet him in normal circumstances. Through their exchange, Jesus is reminded that God's grace isn't limited. It is abundant beyond human understanding, breaking down borders and barriers.

In Jesus response, we might see our own tendencies to have a very limited view of God, to box God into our own perceptions. We might have a limited view of our own role in God's kingdom. Comprehending the abundance of God's mercy and love isn't easy. I know when I am called to be the face of God to others or when I think about judgement, I am often unexpectedly confronted with God's grace after my own initial response of "not yet" or "not you."

Staying in comfortable places is human. We like to know the people around us and exactly what is expected of us. Just as Jesus' ministry expanded among the Gentiles after his encounter with the Syrophenician women as he continues to heal in distant places, crossing our self-imposed borders offers us new ways of living out our faith.

When we are drawn into something new, crossing geographic, social, or economic borders; when we enter a new place or a new ministry, we come to a point where we more clearly see the limitations we have set on our relationships with God, with ourselves, and with others. It is in those places, those ministries that those relationships have deepened and grown.

This morning, during the Ministry Fair, you'll be invited to consider how you will embody your faith this year. Perhaps, this is the year that you will be willing cross into new territory—to get involved in a ministry you hadn't considered before; one that will bring you face-to-face with someone you might not meet under other circumstances.

Through this ministry, perhaps someone will experience your living faith through your works.

Perhaps the challenge of being in a new place, with new people, will spark your imagination and open your heart toward a more expansive understanding of the limitless bounds of God's mercy and love in your own lives and in the lives you touch.

Amen.