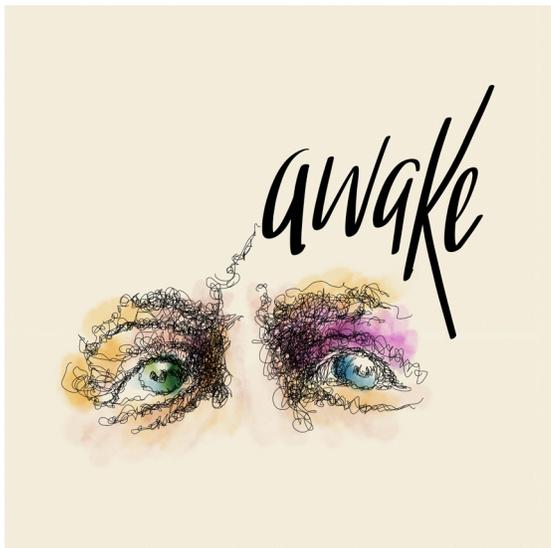




Sermon Growth Guide

May 1, 2022

Awake to Racial Difference



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Mark 7:24-30

Key Verse: Mark 7:26 The woman was a Greek, born in Syrian Phoenicia. She begged Jesus to drive the demon out of her daughter.

Big Idea: Jesus tears down racial walls, nailing racial hostility on the cross, enabling us to be reconciled to one another and live at peace with one another.

Foundations

Issues can divide us. How we look at things like race, sex, politics and the like can cause us to separate and inspire hatred.

Jesus was not blind or asleep to the difficult issues of life together. We're invited on a journey together this series to live life awake through the eyes of Jesus.

Week One: Race. In our passage this week, Jesus interacts with a Syrophenician woman, a Gentile. She is a woman of another race.

At first, it appears that Jesus is defending the idea that people of different races cannot interact, but then we see that Jesus has actually been naming the difference in order to break it down and cross over.

Consider how the work of Christ is proclaimed in Ephesians 2:14-16.

“For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.”

Race is a hot topic. Pray that the Spirit guide and guard your hearts, minds, and discussion.

Understanding God's Word

Together, read Mark 7:24-30.

What do we learn about Jesus' reputation in the first two verses?

How does the Syrophenician Woman exhibit Kingdom faith?

What is the result of this interaction? If you have not already done so, read Ephesians 2:14-16 above and, drawing too from the sermon, host a discussion on God's desire regarding race.

Applying God's Word

How can you join God in creating peace between your race(s) and the races around you in your everyday life?

Witnessing God's Word

We live as recipients of Jim Crow law that, in part, intentionally separated us by race. The laws have been abolished, but the functional result today is that neighborhoods and areas of town are more racially concentrated than they would otherwise be. One great Kingdom work we can press into is moving toward people of different races with hands of friendship and ears ready to listen. How can you take your next step in being a minister of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:11-21)?

Today we start a series that has been coming together for a long time. It is kind of a “hot topics” sermon series. Our Young Adult Ministry, Base Camp, has been taking on hot topics the last few months. Pastor Greg asked them to submit notes anonymously, asking what they would like to hear Greg teach about. Brave! Race. Sex. Politics. Women’s issues. These are all top of mind. Sometimes a church like ours is considered blind, asleep, uninterested in the things that trouble peoples’ minds the most. Well, let’s jump into the deep waters together! Why not? See, here’s the thing: Jesus knew all these troubles. Jesus was not surprised, and is not surprised, by any of these debates that trouble our minds. He knew them all. And as we look at the Gospel of Mark, we see that Jesus addressed them directly. His moral teaching changed the world and can change it still.

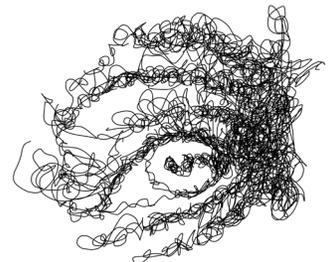
As a follower of Jesus, I have been saved by Jesus. I also want to be submitted to Jesus. Jesus is my Savior; I also want to be subject to Jesus as my Lord. I want to be corrected by Jesus. I want to be shaped by Jesus. I want to live my life more in the likeness of Jesus every day. That means I don’t want to look at these issues through the lens of what divides people into combative camps. I want to know what Jesus thinks—if I can. And I want to think like Him as much as possible. See, we are all wearing goggles. We all have our educations and experiences and backgrounds. I have one goal for us in this series—put on Jesus goggles. Look through the eyes of Jesus. He is not asleep. He is **Awake**.

So today we talk about race. Racism is a problem of the fallen human condition. It can be understood on two levels. First, it is the tendency in each of us to judge others on the basis of ethnicity and consider ourselves superior. That’s no good, and we all suffer from it to some degree. Second, racism is the larger problem of societies and systems that advantage some ethnicities and disadvantage others. It’s

a social problem in our life together as citizens. We have to be honest enough to recognize that for all the virtues of our own nation, we live in a country that did disadvantage minorities, particularly Black Americans, for hundreds of years and right up until the last generation. Through the era of slavery and then post-slavery, there were literally laws on the books to disenfranchise Black Americans. Voting, education, access to loans, real estate, health care, policing, in all these areas, it wasn’t that long ago that these laws were changed—and they were changed to make things better, by which I mean more like of the Kingdom of God—but it is understandable that some lingering effects of this social sin are still washing out and there are still problems to address.

But how does Jesus see it? That’s what matters. Look through the eyes of Jesus. Jesus lived in a society that separated and advantaged or disadvantaged people on the basis of race. As a Jew, he was not part of the dominant people of that time. The Romans were dominant. But Jews were favored over some other races, such as the ethnicity of the woman we meet today. Jesus has left the boundaries of Israel. He went to the coast. He met a woman who was outside of His own race boundaries. A Greek-speaker. A Gentile. A Syrophenician woman—probably what we would call today Lebanese. She looked different. She talked different. She dressed different. Her foods were not His foods. Her songs were not His songs. How does Jesus deal with race difference? If you are like me, you will be a little surprised.

“Jesus left that place and went to the vicinity of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know it; yet he could not keep his presence secret. In fact, as soon as she heard about him, a woman whose little daughter was possessed by an impure spirit came and fell at his feet. The woman was a Greek, born in Syrian Phoenicia. She begged Jesus to drive the demon out



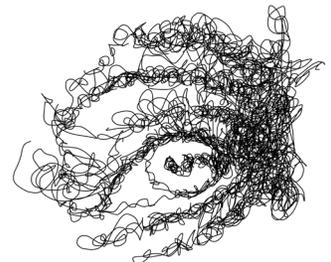
of her daughter.” (Mark 7:24-26) Here Jesus is found interacting with a Gentile, a non-Jew. A woman. The passage just before this one was Jesus in debate with religious leaders about what makes a person clean or unclean. It’s not external stuff, Jesus said, but internal stuff. It’s not the outside but the inside that matters. Off He goes to a foreign land and talks to a foreign woman. “Please heal my daughter,” she asks. “If you have power to help, please help.” Some thought just talking to a woman like that was an unclean act.

Is the healing power of Jesus only for the genetic children of Abraham? A foreign woman asks for His help. Are you at all surprised by Jesus’ reply? Jesus says to her: “‘First let the children eat all they want,’ he told her, ‘for it is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to the dogs.’” (Mark 7:27) Um...did Jesus just call her a dog? He sure did. There was a long tradition of Jewish people calling Gentiles dogs. There are few moments in scripture for me where Jesus sounds less like Jesus than this moment. “It is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to the dogs.” How do we understand this? Now, Mark’s Gospel is the Cliff’s-notes Gospel. It’s the PowerPoint presentation Gospel. Mark doesn’t embellish. If he could have written it on slides with bullet points, he would have. Matthew tells this same story, and it’s not just about Jesus and this woman. The disciples are part of it. They tell Jesus to send the woman away, and it seems like what Jesus says is as much for them as for the woman. “I’m just for the Jewish people, right? God’s blessings end at the edge of our own race, right? The power of the Messiah stops at the border, right? We don’t share our food with dogs, right?” Here’s the wall, says Jesus. Here’s the boundary. Does everybody see it? Jesus is aware of the difference and the lines that have been drawn.

How will the woman respond? Will she turn and walk away? Will she spit on the ground and curse at this Jewish rabbi

and His stinking fisherman friends? No doubt her people have some choice words for people like Jesus and His friends. Will she fire back? No. She sticks with it. It’s not right to toss bread at dogs! “‘Lord,’ she replied, ‘even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.’” (Mark 7:28) A little humility. A little humor? A little desperation. Remember, need is an occasion for a new relationship. She hangs in there until the wall comes down. “Then he told her, ‘For such a reply, you may go; the demon has left your daughter.’ She went home and found her child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.” (Mark 7:29-30) Now, that is the Jesus we know. Jesus is back! You can almost see His knowing smile break out as He tells her everything will be well. Bottom line, Jesus healed this woman’s daughter, a foreign woman on foreign soil, a woman of a different race, a different color, a different culture. Jesus healed her daughter. His power is for her and for her children just as much as it is for the children of Abraham.

What do we learn? Jesus was aware of racial issues. Jesus was awake to racial differences. He pointed them out. He didn’t pretend they were not there. We have a friend in town named Dr. MelindaJoy Mingo (or MJ) who speaks about faith and race around the world. She came to speak to our staff last month and shared a story about sitting with a well-intentioned friend who said, “I just don’t really see color.” MJ said, “Hey, that kind of stings. My color is a big part of who I am. It is part of my story; part of my experience. If you don’t see it, you don’t see me.” I think it’s fascinating that Jesus recognizes the existence of a racial difference. Our stories are different. Our backgrounds are different. Our sense of belonging and empowerment and cultural centrality are different. For Jesus, He knew this woman. Jesus knew this woman more than she knew herself—Jesus is God! But for us, we don’t know each other that well. I don’t know what it’s like to be Japanese in California, or



Latino in Chicago, or Black in Colorado Springs, or a Syrophenician woman in Tyre. If we are going to have the eyes of Jesus, we have to develop the humility and curiosity to ask what we don't know. Be curious. Be humble and curious to know what life is like across a racial difference.

But what else do we learn from Jesus? He didn't just name the difference and sit with it, did He? No. He stepped across it. Why? Because Jesus knew. Jesus knew that we are all made in the image of God. One key term we will need to learn to get through this series is "image-bearers." We are all image bearers. "Then God said, 'Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness...'" So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them." (Genesis 1:26-27) Not only do male and female equally bear the image of God, but God glories in the diversity of all the different types and ethnicities and races God made to bear His image. We know God glories in the diversity, because after all things are restored in Revelation, the diversity is still there. We don't all dissolve into one, plastic Barbie and Ken. The image of God is borne by the diversity of humanity. And what do image bearers deserve? They deserve dignity, respect, honor as bearers of the image of God. In the ancient world, emissaries carried a symbol of the king they represented; an image. It said, in a way, mess with me and you mess with my king. Every person is an image bearer worthy of dignity. Jesus knew that. Jesus stepped across the line. Any philosophy or curriculum that seeks to make the lines permanent and impassable is not in line with the eyes of Jesus. Jesus breaks barriers. Jesus bridges divides. Jesus brings together. Jesus knew she was an image-bearer.

Jesus knew His ministry was going to breach the shores of the genetic line of Abraham and the blessings God poured out on one people would become blessing for all people. One church. One

body. One blood. United in Christ. Jesus knew that His own blood spilled on the cross was the blood of all peoples. One of Jesus' favorite ways to refer to Himself is "Son of Man." One of us. One with all of us. By dying on the cross, Jesus united us all in His grace by His blood. Jesus knew all that as He looked into the eyes of the gentile woman in Tyre.

I tell you, I have made a point to learn a lot more about the challenges of racial difference over the last few years. Serving here at First Pres as your pastor, I have been in multiple city-level meetings about race. One summer two years ago, every night on the news was coverage of protestors on the steps of City Hall—and in the background, our own First Pres! Through COSILoveYou, we were able to bring meetings together between the mayor, the police chief, and the protestors. It was humbling to be in those meetings. I knew I had a lot to learn. We need curiosity. We need humility. We need the eyes of Jesus more than the goggles and lenses that divide us into camps. We need the eyes of Jesus.

Jesus is the one who brings us to this table. Each of us who wants it has a place here. Each of us who receives from the hand of Jesus can be fed here. None of us deserve to be here at this table. Do you know what else happens at this table? We are equalized. We are brought together. An old reformed liturgy of communion says, "And as this grain has been gathered from many fields into one loaf, and these grapes from many hills into one cup, grant, O Lord, that your whole Church may soon be gathered from the ends of the earth into your kingdom." Diversity, yes; superiority, never. Difference, sure; prejudice, no. We sit at one table, awake, aware, curious and humble to know one another better with the open eyes of Jesus.

