

Mark 7:24-37
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“Be Opened”

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One quote I read this week stated, “Don’t be afraid to be open-minded, your brain is not going to fall out.” But the quote I really liked was this one, “Middle age is where your broadness of mind and narrowness of waist -- change places.”

As I enter the early years of my 5th decade on earth, I admit I have noticed a little bit more closed mindedness within me. I sense just a bit of resistance to self-driving cars or drones owned only for recreational use. I have no interest in trying to fly around in a bat suit. I am not sure I’d would be ok with a Robot cleaning my house. While I am far from completely turning my back on inventions coming along, I do find that my first response is occasionally one of resistance, instead of excitement. This seems a stance that is a little more cautious and a little less open minded, and open hearted.

It’s funny how reading the stories of the bible in different decades of life can sometimes produce new insights. I have never noticed before how “un” open Jesus is in this gospel story. We hear how he did not want his disciples to go telling everyone about all the wonderful work he was doing. That isn’t very open. Then, in the first story Jesus tries to dismiss the Syrophenician woman’s request to heal her daughter simply because she is not Jewish. That is pretty closed-hearted for a savior who we envision as ready to help or heal anyone who comes along. It made we wonder if Jesus, even in his 30’s, is getting a little case of the mind/waist place changes.

In this second story today we hear Jesus, after taking the person to a private location, a sort of un-open thing to do, Jesus heals the person with the command to “Be Opened.”

We know how one version of this sermon goes. Be Open... Be open to those who are different. Be open to those who need help. Be open to truth and wisdom, justice and peace. Be open to God’s Spirit.

It’s a challenge to us when life becomes stale, when ideas and beliefs become cemented within us. Jesus invites us to open our eyes to see new sights. Open our ears to hear new sounds. Open our minds to learn new information. Unleash our gifts in new ways. Open our hearts to sense new life.

But when we look at Jesus we sense a disconnect... he just does not seem very open in this story, at least not without a lot of coaxing, or his own disciples ignoring his request to keep quiet. Is this one of those do as I say, not as I do times?

Looking at Jesus I began to think about other experience where pain, grief, and heartache sometimes cause us to clam up, and I wondered about the response of the church to these times in our lives.

For instance, it is very difficult to risk loving, and marriage after the divorce or death of a spouse or partner. The church historically does not have a good track record on supporting divorced people who find the strength and courage to love again after they have experienced such tremendous pain and loss. The church has chosen too often to create hoops to jump through, or worse yet, cast aside divorced people through our teachings, leaving these courageous people as rubble in our path. So, I think it is very open when some pastors, and churches honestly affirm those who risk loving and commitment again when they know first hand the pain which may result.

Secondly, it is difficult to risk openness after we have been wronged. When we are wronged, our ability to trust others is damaged. Society, and sometimes the church too, has told us to just buck up, get over it, get on with our life, but all that does is allow the damage to fester and grow. So, I think it is decidedly open when the church takes time to listen, to care, and to be a trustworthy community to help the person rebuild their trust in humankind.

There are many others we could note but the last one I'd like to highlight is; it also can be difficult to risk openness when there are unofficial rules that have run amok. Be they unwritten "rules" which cover up a few inappropriate touches of another employee at work. Or rules in school about who can talk to whom or what group is or isn't allowed to hang out with another group. Or rules that say you can't do anything that your friends don't approve of? Or rules that say asking for help means you are weak. Or rules that allow bashing or mocking of different belief systems or personal identities. Too often the church has remained silent on these issues. So, I think it is very openminded and open hearted when Christians push through these "rules" to be an example of justice in the workplace, healthy community, cross-group friendships in school or Sunday School, and accepting of diverse belief systems and people.

Still we wonder, what *is* Jesus doing, telling us to "be Opened," suggesting this is an act of healing, but acting very closed off in these stories?

As I become more aware of my own slightly reserved attitudes, I begin to see other areas in my life where I am more closed then I realized and... I wonder if Jesus has a message for me and any of us who are in this boat with me...

What if Jesus is temporarily embodying the very closed-ness many of us demonstrate, closed-ness which may result from unresolved fear, pain, or grief; and then, through his own transformation before our very eyes he reveals how even the most closed off person can find themselves, by the power of God's love and help, find themselves once again open to healing, to diversity, to love, and to truth. What if Jesus is becoming more like us to show us how we can become more like him. This power of Jesus to transform our closed self to an accepting, serving, open hearted self, is available to each of us no matter who or where we are.

By the power of God, we don't have to become those whose broad minds and narrow waists, change places. -- Amen