

“Invasion of Personal Space”

Sermon by Lisa Crismore

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Mark 7:24-37

“From there he set out and went away to the region of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know he was there. Yet he could not escape notice, but a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately heard of him, and she came and bowed down at his feet. Now the woman was a Gentile, of Syrophenician origin. She begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. He said to her, “Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs.” But she answered him, “Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.” Then he said to her, “For saying that, you may go – the demon has left your daughter.” So she went home, found the child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.

The he returned from the region of Tyre, and went by way of Sidon towards the Sea of Galilee. In the region of Decapolis. They brought to him a deaf man who had an impediment in his speech; and they begged him to lay his hand on him. He took him aside in private, away from the crowd, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spat and touched his tongue. Then looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, “Ephphatha,” that is, “Be opened.” And immediately his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. Then Jesus ordered them to tell no one; but the more he ordered them, the more zealously they proclaimed it. They were astounded beyond measure, saying, “He has done everything well; he even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak.”

Have you ever had anyone invade your personal space? Google defines personal space as - the physical space immediately surrounding someone, into which any encroachment feels threatening to or uncomfortable for them. (<https://www.google.com/search?ei=Hy2ZW9qRJJLwsQWjhI24Bw&q=personal+space>) When someone gets into my personal space, I feel vulnerable and uncomfortable. I want to take a step back or push back and reclaim my space. What does it feel like when I invade someone’s personal space? Am I out to seek control of the situation or am I trying to thrust my power upon the other person so that they feel inferior to me? Or am I showing care for someone? Is there a time when invading one’s personal space can be helpful? Is there a time when invading one’s person space can be harmful? Is personal space only physical or is it also emotional?

Jesus is faced with the Gentile woman today invading his personal space. We have no idea why he travels to Tyre. He appears to be without his disciples. It is clear that he does not want anyone to know that he is there. Is he wanting to seek a place for Sabbath rest? Is he tired of healing people? Is he exhausted from teaching and traveling from place to place? Has his disciples worn him out from not always doing what they were called to do? Whatever it is, we find Jesus being fully human when he encounters the Syrophenician woman. This is something that we rarely see in scripture even though we know he is fully human and fully divine.

From out of nowhere, this woman shows up. And before Jesus knows what hits him, she bows down at his feet and begs him to cast the demons out of her daughter. It is clear that she is desperate. Jesus’ answer hits us by surprise. We would expect like so many times in scripture that he would simply heal her. We can hear him say, “Your faith has healed your daughter – go home to find her healed.” But he responds in the most peculiar way by saying, “Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs.” Did he just call her and her child dogs! No, he didn’t! **But yes, he did.** Has fatigue put blinders on Jesus when it comes to extending mercy to non-Jewish people? Or is this a teaching moment for Jesus to be open to healing a Gentile child? This woman is quick to respond by saying, “Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.”

It is though a light bulb comes on. The cultural and religious differences are dissolved. The fatigue is wiped away. The boldness of this invasion of personal space results in Jesus healing the demonic girl. The fully divine Jesus kicks in and clearly sees and is opened to his mission.

As Jesus leaves Tyre, he has another encounter. This time it is with a man who is deaf and has a speech impediment. It is a group of people who have approached Jesus to seek healing for the man. Jesus takes the man away from the crowd to a private place. It is Jesus who invades the space of the man. He breaks all the boundary rules by sticking his fingers into his ears and on his tongue while spitting into his mouth. He looks to the heavens and sighs. You wonder if the sigh was his way of acknowledging to God that he gets it. He says, "Ephphatha" which means "be opened." And the man was healed.

In both situations there was invasion of personal space that resulted in healing. In both healing situations people are opened to new possibilities. Possibilities that changed their lives.

As I processed this scripture, I had this visual image of Jesus walking to Tyre and then Sidon. He was travelling from place to place to place. He was meeting people, people and more people. There were many encounters. That is where the power of Jesus was seen.

As I think about my own life, I am a pastor, friend and stranger. How are my encounters with others and their personal space effected by the power of Jesus? Before I look at others, I need to look at myself. What are the demons in my closet that I have held onto and not given over for Jesus' healing? What are the heavy burdens that we all carry and will not release to Jesus for healing to occur?

Recently, there had been this invisible wall that had come between my dear friend and me. This wall was causing the lines of communication to break down and we were struggling with connecting to each other. Thankfully, my friend reached out to me and ask that we sit down and talk. In that personal space, we were able to be vulnerable and honest with each other. In that space, there was restoration. That is the power of Jesus' healing.

As a pastor, I am finding that our congregation is aging and facing many health problems. There are times when our members do not have someone to advocate for them and they are not receiving the care that they should. I find that there is this boundary line of member's personal space when their care and health are at risk. I find it difficult to know when to overstep the boundary line and when to not overstep it.

My friend, Sarah Sedgwick, who is a pastor in Pennsylvania and her husband became foster parents to 3 children this past spring. I am sure Sarah never dreamed of this when she took the oldest as a little sister in the Big Sister/Little Sister program over 6 years ago. When the mother of these siblings found herself going to prison. She made the decision to leave them in the care of her ex-boyfriend and girlfriend. Sarah and Jim rescued them when they discovered they were not receiving adequate care. This has clearly been an adjustment as Sarah has never had children of her own. The biggest challenge has been the middle child. After months of acting out in anger and rage, the truth of this child being sexually assaulted by the ex-boyfriend and the girl friend has come to light. This is when the invasion of personal space can be very harmful! God DOES NOT condone this! And yet, the healing now can only occur when this child is given a safe space to speak about these incidents. Sarah, Jim and the therapists have hope that Jesus' healing can happen in this personal space.

When the invasion of personal space takes time and energy and sometimes like Jesus I find myself falling short. If you are not friends with me on Facebook or didn't attend the all officer's meeting yesterday, you may not have heard that our dear sister in Christ, Liz Arrieta died on Friday. Liz came numerous times to serve on our Vacation Bible School team and Campo Amistad at Pyoca.

She had an amazing gift with children and was faithful disciple of Christ. I discovered that she had breast cancer this past winter but never dreamed that it was serious. Liz was a very private person when it came to her health. After talking with Manuela, her cancer had metastasized to her bones over a year ago and at that point there was little hope. And yet, no one really knew this because Liz didn't tell us. Knowing Liz, she put her life in God's hands and had faith that God would be by her side no matter what the result would be. I regret not invading her personal space and asking more diligently about her health. It would not have changed the outcome and honestly, it is not about me. Really, Liz was truly healed. I had a pastor once tell me that death is the true healer. In death, there is no more pain and you are truly restored to new life. The ultimate invasion of personal space by God is death and resurrection. The very moment when God claims us like Jesus and takes us home! That is the closest we can get to God. That is total healing!

Thanks be to Jesus Christ who shows us how to be vulnerable to allow our space to be invaded so that we can receive healing. Amen.