

SERMON FOR THE 14TH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST (B), PROPER 18, 10ix2006
[FEAST OF THE NATIVITY OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY]
EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH OF SAINT JAMES THE APOSTLE / BROGUE, PENNSYLVANIA
10:00, ANTE-COMMUNION LITURGY, LBW SETTING 2
DEUTERONOMY 4:1-2,6-9; PSALM 15; JAMES 1:17-27; MARK 7:1-8,14-15,21-23

J. J. !

Grace to you and peace from Him Who is and Who was and
Who is to come. ☩ Amen.

THEN HE RETURNED FROM THE REGION OF TYRE, AND
WENT BY WAY OF SIDON TOWARD THE SEA
OF GALILEE, IN THE REGION OF THE DECAPOLIS.

--M ark7:31

The Gospels all devote a great deal of space to detail. These details all pertain to the life of Our Lord. They include the details of any story about any person: *Who* is speaking or otherwise acting in the story? *What* did that person *say* or *teach*, or what did he or she *mean* to say? What did others say in response this speech and teaching? What did the person who interests us *do*? What did others do in response to those

actions? And, also essential to any narration of the life of any person, *where* did all of this take *place*?

Where matters, both in the world of the Bible and in our world. Whenever I read this narrative in Mark, or the other version of it in Matthew, Chapter 15, I wonder about that place, that *Gentile* region in which Jesus was wandering with His Disciples for some reason, for His own reasons, reasons we should at least try to understand.

The two cities mentioned in today's Gospel, Tyre and Sidon, were real cities, and they still are, no thanks to the ravages of time and war. They were inhabited by real people with real problems, and they still are. They included a worried mother with an emotionally disturbed daughter. They included a deaf mute and those who pitied him. Today they include children who cringe at the sound of aircraft and who cannot sleep because of the nightmares of war. Today they also

include those whose eardrums have been ruptured by man-made explosions, those who no longer have mouths to speak and those who have seen such horrors that they have lost the power of speech.

They were Phoenicians and Syrians in Jesus' day. Today they are Lebanese. In Jesus' day they were occupied and exploited by the Romans. Today they are occupied or dominated and exploited by murderers calling themselves 'The Army of God,' by Syria next door, which claims their territory as its own, and by the far-away, powerful Persian state which has no doubt about its destiny to dominate the entire region and its right to place at risk or ruin altogether the happiness of smaller nations.

In Jesus' day, up in that region north of the Galilee, they knew the condescending contempt of the descendants of Jacob for the descendants of Esau, the ethnic and religious prejudice

in which Our Lord was raised and over which He triumphed, as we behold in today's Gospel. In our day—and only a month ago constantly on our television screens—even those among them who are baptized into Christ and follow the way of the Cross know what it is to be treated by Jews as dogs are treated throughout the Semitic world, though some Israeli soldiers show them the kindness of Jesus, treating their elderly as their own parents, and their children as the children and siblings they have been mobilized to defend. You can never be sure when the soldiers come what sort they will be, those who have endured in that place say.

They are people trying to live, trying to build up something of usefulness and beauty, something worth passing on to their children and, over and over again, they very nearly succeed in doing this, only to have their gift to posterity ruined by others who do not care about any posterity but their own.

Christ comes to those whose problems seem beyond fixing, like the problems of Tyre or Sidon or Beirut, and into just such a world as that. He responds to the need of people within those situations, and He does this in an almost hidden way, in what may seem a random manner: He responds to a woman He would never seek out in a house in which He was attempting to hide from the crowds, to a man whose friends or family loved him so much they brought him to the One they had heard might be able to help restore lost power of speech or hearing.

Not all the problems are fixed, not even a few of them. The blind stupidity of war rolls and rages on, right over the lives of those who wanted life, not war and all its waste. But, where Jesus touched a life, here and there, and claimed it for the Kingdom of God's mercy, something better at the heart of the universe was revealed. We cannot fix all of the problems in our

own little lives, let alone those of our brothers and sisters half a world away. But we can, both here and there, help to bind up a broken body or a broken heart, sometimes on a day when we did not plan any such undertaking for the Kingdom of Heaven. But then, and there, the heart of God will be revealed and glorified. May we all be witnesses and partakers of this miracle this week, in this our world. ✠Amen.

Now to Him Who loves us and has freed us our sins by His blood, and has made of us a kingdom, priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen. ✠

