

## Sunday, September 8, 2024 - Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost

### First Reading: Isaiah 35:4-7a

*At this time the greatest threat were the Assyrians, who were not going to destroy the Southern Kingdom, but they were going to defeat and deport the Northern Kingdom.*

*Isaiah 36: 18 – Assyrian official: Do not let Hezekiah mislead you by saying, The Lord will save us. Has any of the gods of the nations saved their land out of the hand of the king of Assyria?  
37: 14 – Hezekiah received the letter from the hand of the messengers and read it; then Hezekiah went up to the house of the Lord and spread it before the Lord.*

*When have you faced a situation so dire that the only thing you could do was to spread it out before the Lord?*

- 35: 1 – The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad, the desert shall rejoice and blossom.  
2 – It shall blossom abundantly and rejoice with joy and singing.  
3 – Strengthen the weak hands and make firm the feeble knees.  
4 – Say to those who are of a fearful heart, "Be strong, do not fear! Here is your God.  
He will come with vengeance, with terrible recompense.  
He will come and save you."  
5 – Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped.  
6 – Then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy.  
For waters shall break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert.  
7 – The burning sand shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water.

*How is the effect of abundant rain upon the desert a symbol of hope and new life for you?*

### Second Reading: James 2:1-17

1 - Do you with your acts of favoritism really believe in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ?

*Is there any way in which you show favoritism? If so, what do you need to change?*

2-4 - For if a person with gold rings and in fine clothes comes into your assembly, and if a poor person in dirty clothes also comes in, and if you take notice of the one wearing the fine clothes and say, "Have a seat here, please," while to the one who is poor you say, "Stand there," or, "Sit at my feet," have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?

5-7 - Has not God chosen the poor to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom that he has promised to those who love him? But you have dishonored the poor. Is it not the rich who oppress you? Is it not they who drag you into court? Is it not they who blaspheme the excellent name that was invoked over you?

10 - Whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it.

14-17 - What good is it if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill," and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.

*How do you show your faith through the good things that you do?*

### **Gospel: Mark 7:24-37**

24-30 - Jesus went to the region of Tyre. A woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit heard about him and came and bowed down at his feet. She 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." She answered him, "Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." He said to her, "You may go—the demon has left your daughter." So she went home, found the child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.

*Here are three explanations that have been given as to why Jesus treated the woman as He did. During the process of the conversation He changed His mind and became more inclusive in His thinking.*

*He wanted to give the woman a chance to strengthen her faith through exercising it. He knew that she would be going back to a tough, hostile situation, and He wanted to help prepare her for it.*

*Matthew 15: 23 – He did not answer her at all.*

*He wanted to show the disciples how bad their attitude was.*

*Matthew 15: 23 – His disciples urged him, saying, "Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us."*

*In Matthew's account the woman calls Jesus Son of David once and Lord three times.*

*At the end Jesus says to the woman, "Great is your faith!"*

31 - Then he returned from the region of Tyre and went by way of Sidon towards the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis.

32 - They brought to him a deaf man who had an impediment in his speech; and they begged him to lay his hand on him.

*How fortunate the man was to have friends like those.*

33 - He took him aside in private, away from the crowd.

*Jesus shows sensitivity to the man by dealing with him away from the crowd.*

He put his fingers into his ears, and he spat and touched his tongue.

*The power of human touch.*

34 - Then looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, "Ephphatha," that is, "Be opened."

*How good it is to know that when Jesus sees our need, He sighs.*

*Cf. Eliot and E.T. – "Ouch"*

35 - Immediately his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly.

36-37 - 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.

*What have you seen Jesus do – what have you experienced Jesus doing for you – that has made you not just astounded, but astounded beyond measure?*