



# Sunday's Sermon

Pastor Lara Forbes



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Growing Together in Christ to Love and Serve All People

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## Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost

September 5, 2021

Mark 7:24-37

Grace and peace to you from God, our Creator, and from our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

<sup>1</sup>Reverend Sue, as she is known, is a pastor on the south coast of Australia. And she tells the story of one Sunday seeing a young Middle Eastern man come into the church while she was celebrating worship, halfway through the thanksgiving prayer for Communion.

She reports that he seemed pleasant enough, but he was wearing a backpack and just kept walking down the aisle toward the front of the church. She continued with the prayer, and admits that she began to think the worst. Eventually the young man stopped and sat down in the front row. He didn't take part in the Eucharist, but he did join the congregation for tea after worship.

As Reverend Sue spoke with him, she learned that he was a young man from Afghanistan who had come to Australia as an unaccompanied minor. He and two other young men had been housed in a vacant church house, so he had a good association with the church.

And although he was a practicing Muslim, he came to the local Anglican church when he moved into a new area. After that day, he came frequently to join the congregation for morning tea and a chat.

I don't think anyone will argue that our world is divided. In a manner of speaking, lines have been drawn - and are being drawn - in a variety of places and a variety of ways. Divisions are being made in terms of geographic boundaries, as well as who belongs to what group of people.

And that isn't anything new. Lines were drawn in biblical times, too, and they also marked divisions. People were cast aside, segregated, and considered to be different or threatening or potentially harmful.

By and large, though, Jesus crossed those lines - erasing them in the process. And sometimes people crossed those lines on their own to get to him. And when they did, most of the time he welcomed them, but we know of at least one woman whom he insulted and tried to dismiss.

In one story in today's gospel reading, Jesus was literally in the face of a man in order to heal him. And in the other, even though she was kneeling at his feet begging for the health of her daughter, the *response* of the Syrophenician woman to Jesus' insult was as in-your-face as it could get. But he acknowledged her and healed her daughter.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.companionsontheway.com/post/the-good-news-is-for-all>

The man and the woman in these stories were cast aside for different reasons. But in their stories we see an embodiment of faith in God that can't be confined by any lines that human beings might draw.

The man who was deaf wouldn't have allowed Jesus to do what he did to heal him without it. And without faith, the woman might have simply crawled away in shame after Jesus called her a dog. The way they embodied their faith, the way they lived it out, was foundational to who they were.

This is the faith that James gets at in his writings. Faith isn't about head knowledge; it's about orienting our lives toward God and the actions that come out of that - the way we treat each other in here and in the community-at-large.

It's a whole-hearted, whole-life discipleship that binds us to each other in God's love and compels us to act on behalf of those who are in need - regardless of where they might come from or what their particular faith tradition might be.

A lot of people confuse this with doing works in order to earn our salvation. But our salvation's a done deal. Embodying our faith isn't about doing things in order to earn God's favor or receive something in return. It's about living life in faithful response to the love, grace, and salvation that we've already received from God.

It's about recognizing that Jesus erases the lines we draw between us. It isn't always easy to recognize them because our tendency is usually to react, and to hold people at arm's length. But responding is different.

Responding is a faithful approach. Responding asks questions and seeks to understand, to get to know another person for who they truly are instead of basing our knowledge on surface-level assumptions. It's an embodiment of faith.

As Reverend Sue recalled the story that I shared a few minutes ago, she recognized the lines that had been drawn for her by world circumstances and events. And she recognized them as soon as the young man entered her church that day. But Jesus erased them that same day.

Instead of reacting, Reverend Sue responded. She engaged in conversation with the young man, she got to know his name and over time the story of how he came to be where he was.

There are lines being drawn all over the place in our world. We are constantly separating ourselves from one another, segregating ourselves from people who we consider to be different or disagreeable or threatening or potentially harmful. Casting people aside often simply because of assumptions we make.

...refugees from Afghanistan and other places, people who are part of the LGBTQ+ community, people who are undocumented living in the US, political affiliations, people who live with mental health diagnoses, anyone living in poverty or experiencing homelessness, anyone we think *might* be different from us.

But Jesus erases those lines we draw. And as he does, we recognize that our faith demands that we live a whole-hearted, whole-life discipleship that binds us to each other in God's love and compels us to act on behalf of those who are in need - regardless of who they are or where they might come from.

It isn't about doing things for others in order to earn God's favor or anything else in return. It's about living life in faithful response to the love, grace, and salvation that we've already received from God.

This coming week, I invite you to look for the lines we've drawn. Whether they're ones you've drawn for yourself or ones that our world has drawn. I invite you to see the person, or people, who are on the other side of them.

And I invite you to see Jesus crossing those lines, and the way they become blurry and then disappear when he does. Engage with the person or people who are no longer separated from you. Recognize the whole-hearted and whole-life discipleship that binds us to one another.

Recognize the way it binds us to God's love, and the empowerment it gives us to faithfully live in response to it. Thanks be to God! Amen.