

“Open Eyes, Open Hearts”

Proverbs 22: 1-2, 8-9, 22-23

Mark 7: 24-37

This week you may have heard some of the reports about the hearings of the nomination of Brett Kavanaugh to the US Supreme Court. One of the reports I noticed was Judge Kavanaugh’s reference to the description of judicial work as calling *balls and strikes.* This was not the first time the line has been used at a Supreme Court hearing.

Jim Evans, a former major league umpire who also ran an Umpire School and advisor to the president of Minor League Baseball said yes, there are similarities AND, there is more[[1]](#footnote-1). He concluded the piece this way:

*As an umpire, you learn to position yourself on the field so that you’re in the most advantageous location to observe a pitch or a play. You learn to read cues and make the proper adjustments when something changes. It can take years of experience, an exhaustive understanding of the rules and consistency in your calls to become a credible umpire, and even then, you’re going to be in the middle of a lot of arguments and controversies. As a mentor of mine reminded me when I started: There was only ever one perfect man, and they crucified him, so umpires have to learn how to handle criticism. As with judging, the tough calls are hardly ever obvious. Balls and strikes are elusive creatures.*

That made me wonder if the life of faith in Jesus Christ is like that as well. You don’t have to be a professional to be a Christian. But to be a Christian who tends and shares the fruits of God’s Spirit requires a lot of attention and care. It doesn’t just happen.

Every time we read, study, fellowship, learn and worship, there is context. There are always things happening in the world that matter to us. Some of these are obvious. Some of them are not.

What is happening in your life matters. So what is happening in your life?

In my life we are beginning week 4 of a major renovation project at our house. This phase may be completed in another 2 weeks but then there is another phase that won’t happen until the end of October. One hopes.

In our life as a church, we are entering a new season as we approach the one-year departure of your founding pastor Dr. Dave Fry. There are lots of emotions circulating – remembering when and looking forward.

In our nation, we are in a season of political conversation, discernment and controversy. Yet even so we observe this week a remembrance of the events of September 11, 2001.

With all the noise and change and fear that happen in our lives, we want to find a safe haven. Some people suggest going to scripture for this – and there are places we look for comfort – Psalm 23 – *the Lord is my shepherd* and John 14 – *In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?* [John 14: 2]

But then we may stumble across some passages that make us scratch our heads. Maybe even ask *What is that about?*

Proverbs 22 is known as the place for some practical sayings.

V. 6: Train children in the right way, and when old, they will not stray.

V. 10: Drive out a scoffer, and strife goes out; quarreling and abuse will cease

Vs 17-18: Incline your ear and hear my words, and apply your mind to my teaching;

for it will be pleasant if you keep them within you, if all of them are ready on your lips.

But mixed in there are the other verses about priorities and attitudes toward those who are poor. There is judgment of injustice and a blessing for generosity. These verse point to an understanding that the care of the “poor” is something that is rooted in who God is.

Oh my! But then we listen to the gospel readings. There are 2 stories about healing that Jesus did on the outskirts of the Jewish territory.

For some reason that is not clearly stated Jesus was in the area we know of today as Lebanon in the coastal city of Tyre. Mark writes that he was trying to get away from people. Seems like Jesus was always trying to find a few moments to himself – but they never seemed to come. He goes to a home where he is not known but people still come to him.

He is out of his home territory. And a woman from that region – not a Jewish woman – but someone from outside of the children of Israel – comes to him and asks him to heal her daughter who is as The Message translation renders it *disturbed.*

Remember Jesus is out of his home territory and he responds – as The Message reads *“Stand in line and take your turn. The children get fed first. If there’s any left over, the dogs get it.”*

Christians from that time to this have been working on that. We say that Jesus is both God and human. We are quick to affirm the divine nature, but the reality of Jesus being human is confusing. Is this being rude? Maybe it was a way of saying that the priority goes to the tribe Yeah, we get it. Something like *Make Israel Great Again*.

But this woman is not satisfied. She is respectful and says “*Sir,[or Lord] even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.”*

The Common English Bible translation records Jesus’ response as: *“Good answer!” he said. “Go on home. The demon has already left your daughter.”*

Somewhere along the way this week I read that this is the only time Jesus conducted a healing where the person to be healed was not physically present in front on him.

Then the story shifts from Tyre to the Decapolis – a region around the Sea of Galilee of 10 primarily Greek cities. Even though the Galilee region was home to a large Jesus population and it is where so much of Jesus ministry happened, the place of this account was outside of his home territory.

Again Jesus is found out. There must have been paparazzi like hunters for Jesus in those days. A man who cannot hear or speak is brought to him. Those bringing him ask Jesus to heal him.

Did you notice what Jesus did? He separated the man from those who brought him and he put his fingers in the ears that could not hear and took some spit and put it on the tongues that could not speak. The he commanded – *Open up!* Right then the man could hear and speak!

What would it have been like – not understanding what you saw for you could not hear and not being able to give consent – to be brought before a man who then had you leave those that brought you? Then this one proceeds to put his spit in your mouth and his fingers in your ears. Odd to be sure.

Then Jesus tells the man who could not hear or speak not to tell anyone. But the man is already talking. All who knew him before would know something really strange had happened the next time they say him and he began to speak. He didn’t have to tell them how it had happened. The simple fact that he could speak would proclaim his healing in bold ways.

The command of Jesus to heal this man without voice and hearing is, I think, the key for today. We are to open up our eyes and ears and hearts. We do not do this by ourselves. We do this by the grace of God that comes to us. It is not possible to always summon up within ourselves the ability to be open to what God will do. Our openness happens when we encounter those happenings in our way in the world. They may be a personal as what is happening in your home or with your health or as large as a remembrance of the events of 9/11.

The hymn we will sing speaks to this openness. Listen as you sing. Let the words and the music mingle together in you so that you place yourself in a place where you may be open to God’s ways in your life.

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1. [Sorry, judges, we umpires do more than call balls and strikes](https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/sorry-judges-we-umpires-do-more-than-call-balls-and-strikes/2018/09/07/bd6ba7a2-b227-11e8-a20b-5f4f84429666_story.html?utm_term=.66ef5db926ce). Washington Post. September 7, 2018. Accessed September 8, 2018. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)