

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Sermon manuscript

Sermon Series: DRAWING NEAR

(Growing in prayer)

Desperation

(Mark 7:24-30; 10:46-52)

Study #6

Introduction: A word for today...

John Witte is a friend who is on the pastoral staff at Bandera Road City Church, just up the road from Northwest.

John formerly spent a lot of years serving as a missionary in Uganda working with the Karamoja people.¹ He loved his time in Africa and loved *almost* everything about the Karamoja.

This past week he told me that there was one thing that he had a very hard time getting used to. It was their begging. According to John, they begged from everyone, for everything, all the time. “Ku-omba” is the word for beg in Kiswahili.²

After a while all the begging started to get on John’s nerves. It annoyed him. So one day (in typical American fashion), John called his Karamoja friends together and spoke honestly and from the heart, asking them to please not beg from him anymore. No more “ku-omba.”

¹ John worked with Tom and Jean Reed, whom Northwest supported for a number of years when they also worked and lived in Uganda, working with the Karamoja people.

² Begging is actually a crucial part of societal relating. The Karamoja consider that there isn’t a relationship with someone unless there is “owing” back and forth. So begging is a way to establish and strengthen community.

He explained to them that he didn’t have that much, anyway, and that begging was actually a hindrance to their relationship. He told them that in the West, if you want to help someone out, you help. Being begged often just makes you resistant to helping.

The Africans listened to John, nodded their heads, and seemed to understand what he was saying.

They all parted friends and John walked away. After a short while he noticed that one man had followed him. John turned to him and the man immediately started to beg him for something.

John was shocked. “*Didn’t you hear what I was just saying? I don’t want to be begged!*”

To which the man replied, “*Aren’t you ever desperate for anything?*”

When you are desperate, you beg. Among the Karamoja people, begging is a way of life because there, everyone is desperate all the time.

John then told me that when you go to an African prayer meeting and listen as people pray to God, when they ask Him for things, they say “ku-omba.”

Ku-omba is the act of desperate people who do not have the food, drink, feed for livestock, or clothing they need.

Ku-omba is also the act of people who understand that they desperately need what only God can provide. Ku-omba is the way we talk to God when we really “get” that the things that matter most to us in life are the things over which we have the least control.

In the past several weeks we have considered worship and confession and petition and praying together. We have considered God’s work in allowing or orchestrating our lives to drive us to dependence on Him.

Today, we are still thinking about prayer. But we are considering it under the heading of desperation. Desperate people pray for what they know only God can provide.

We see exactly that going on in an exchange Jesus had with someone when He and His disciples were traveling outside of Israel, in the region of Tyre.³

Motherly Desperation (Mark 7:24-30)

Setting the Scene: Jesus Looks for - and Doesn't Find - Privacy (v. 24)

[24] Jesus got up and went away from there to the region of Tyre.⁴ And when He had entered a house, He wanted no one to know of it...

In Jesus' trip to Tyre He and the twelve would have found the most foreign land imaginable. It was different from Israel in terms of topography, ethnicity, morality, and worship.

But the trip was necessary. He and the Twelve were exhausted and needed to escape the pressure cooker of Israel as well as the opposition of the Pharisees.

So off they went for some R & R. But as desperately as He might have longed for privacy, it was not to be. Even here, even in pagan Tyre, "**He could not escape notice.**"

People had already heard of His power over sickness and disease and demons. There was no way Jesus was going to fly "under the radar."

Out of those who were seeking Him, Mark zeroes in on one person, in particular, a mother.

A Mother Approaches (vv. 25-26a)

Crisis for a little daughter (v. 25)

The world over, mothers are known for their concern for their children. They fight for the welfare of their kids and when something goes wrong, they fly into action.

Something was definitely wrong with the daughter of this mother.

[25] But after hearing of Him, a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately came and fell at His feet.

This that we read about here has got to be a mother's worst nightmare - a demon has invaded the life and the soul of her "**little daughter.**"

It's hard for us to even imagine such a thing? We aren't told how the demon made itself manifest in this little girl's life.

Something, though, must have convinced the mother that there was more going on than the terrible 2's or 3's, the fearsome 4's or 5's or the scary 6's and 7's.

This mother had heard about Jesus. She knew of His reputation for casting out demons. She heard that He was in town and so she made her way to Him as quickly as she could and threw herself at Jesus' feet. Her every action shouts desperation.

Then we read of this mother's status in society.

This mother's status (v. 26a)

[26] Now the woman was a Gentile, of the Syro-phoenician race.

For a variety of reasons, no self-respecting rabbi of Jesus' day would have had anything to do with this woman.

First off, she was a woman. In Judaism, there has never been a disrespect of women. In fact, women were accorded great respect in Old Testament Scripture and in Jewish life, generally.

³ Except for a brief moment on the shore of the Decapolis (Mark 5) to deal with the Gerasene demoniac, this is the only time Jesus was out of Jewish territory.

⁴ Tyre was the major city in the district of Phoenicia, the land of present-day Lebanon. The political region of Phoenicia hugged the coastline of the Mediterranean just north of Galilee and metropolitan Tyre itself was located about twenty miles to the northwest of Capernaum.

But, there were strict protocols concerning what kind of interaction between a man and a woman was proper. No rabbi would have spoken publicly with a woman to whom he was not related.

Second, she was a Gentile, a non-Jew, pagan through and through. Jews didn't hang with Gentiles.

Third, her daughter was demonized with an unclean spirit - and who would want to have anything to do with that?!⁵

This woman would have known about all of those barriers between her and this rabbi - and still she rushed to bring her request to Jesus.

This was not just a "one and done" asking, either.

A Mother Begs (vv. 26b-29)

The Mother's REPEATED plea (v. 26b)

[26b]...And she kept asking Him to cast the demon out of her daughter.

This mom repeatedly begged Jesus to help her daughter. There is a good, but old word to describe her. She is importunate. She is relentless.

And finally, after repeated "asks", she finally got a rise out of Jesus.

Jesus' surprising answer (v. 27)

[27] And He was saying to her, "Let the children be satisfied first, for it is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs."

If that strikes you as an odd thing to hear from the most loving Man who ever lived, I get it.

It's not diplomatic. It's harsh and insensitive. It's politically VERY incorrect.

⁵ A typical rabbi of Jesus' day would have assumed sinfulness on the part of the mother, the father, or the little girl.

Trust me. When first century Jews referred to Gentiles as "dogs" they weren't commenting on how cute they were.

This may have been exactly the kind of remark a Gentile like this mother would have expected to hear from a Jew, but it's not what we would have expected from Jesus.

Yes, we know that God did choose the Jews, not Gentiles. Yes, Jesus is right to affirm the priority of the Jews.⁶

But Jesus' words do something besides make a case for the Jews being God's chosen people.

Notice that in His response to the woman's desperate plea He did not say, "No."

He very intentionally kept the door open for conversation by answering her with what I'm going to call a one verse parable. The way He answers challenges this desperate mother to stay with Him, to not quit and walk away, to pursue.

And watch this mother. She didn't walk away. She didn't give up. She didn't even seem to take offense at the link between her and "dogs."

No, she got right up in Jesus' face and answered Him from within the parable.⁷

The mother's desperate response (v. 28)

[28] But she answered and said to Him, "Yes, Lord,⁸ but even the dogs under the table feed on the children's crumbs."

Her clever reply shows her understanding and acceptance of Israel's priority with God.

⁶ See Romans 1:16 and elsewhere in the Bible that shows God making a very clear and decisive choice of the Jews over the Gentiles.

⁷ Fascinating, isn't it? This woman is the only person in the Gospels who "got" one of Jesus' parables without having it explained. She's very bright and spiritually sensitive.

⁸ By calling Him "Lord," she affirms His authority.

But her point to Jesus is that while the *children* have priority, the *Gentiles/dogs/outsiders* also have a legitimate claim on the available food, too.⁹

This Gentile woman, this outsider (!), insists that the ministry of Jesus, whom she recognized as the great Jewish Messiah, MUST extend beyond the Jews! His reach has to extend to all people - including her daughter.

"Jesus, the crumbs dropped by the children were intended for the dogs. I'm more than willing to accept crumbs if those crumbs will help my little girl."

She's begging. Ku-omba. Clearly, she's desperate. Clearly, she believes He is good enough and powerful enough to do what she needs.

And just as clearly, Jesus was ready and more than willing to deliver.

A Mother is Rewarded (vv. 29-30)

[29] And He said to her, "Because of this answer go; the demon has gone out of your daughter." [30] And going back to her home, she found the child lying on the bed, the demon having left.

Sweet. Short. Simple.

Jesus assured this desperate mother that her daughter was free. He also assured her (and assures us) that it was her answer - her persistent and desperate, "Not taking a 'No' for an answer" answer - that won the day.

This is a deliverance won by desperation. Jesus wanted her to express her desperation. He wants you and me to express desperation that He will provide for us what only He can provide.

Now, let take a look at another encounter between Jesus yet another desperate soul.

Blind Desperation (Mark 10:46-52)

Setting the Scene: On the way to Jericho (v. 46)

Jesus and His disciples have continued traveling. They are no longer in Gentile regions. They have been moving south through the region of the Decapolis and then into the Herod-controlled land of Perea.

When they got near the southern end of the Jordan, which empties into the northern end of the Dead Sea, they crossed the river.¹⁰

Mark tells us, *[46a] Then they came to Jericho.*¹¹

Jericho was located about five miles from the Jordan River, but it was still in the Jordan River valley. Jesus will soon continue traveling the twenty some-odd miles to Jerusalem where He will die for yours sins and mine.

First, though, He has a fascinating encounter with an individual outside the city limits of Jericho.

Jesus and His disciples are traveling on the road with a crowd of people. It was the Passover season, so the crowds were already on the road heading for Jerusalem to celebrate the feast.

The roads leading to Jerusalem were crowded. And there "he" was, stationed on the side of the road. "He" was always there. You couldn't miss him.

¹⁰ They crossed the Jordan at just about the same point that Joshua and the Jews had crossed before them, on a major ancient highway right across from the city of Jericho, some fourteen hundred years earlier. Noted theologian, S. Lewis Johnson, remarked, "Here is the second Joshua performing miracles in Jericho, again."

¹¹ Today, Jericho is one of the oldest (if not the oldest) continuously inhabited cities on earth. Even in Jesus' time, Jericho was a very old city.

⁹ Technically, when dogs eat crumbs from the floor, they do not rob the children.

Meet Bartimaeus (vv. 46b-48)

Bartimaeus, the BLIND (v. 46b)

[46b] And as He was leaving Jericho with His disciples and a large crowd a blind beggar named Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus, was sitting by the road.

It would not have been an unusual sight to see a blind beggar in the ancient world outside the gates of a major city.

There not being much in the way of a government safety net in the ancient world, the disabled were taken care of by family and friends.

But the disabled would often try to meet their own needs by begging. Our Karamoja friends would say, “ku-omba.” Ancient Jew begged for the charity of strangers.

The name of the blind beggar Jesus encounters is Bartimaeus.¹² That we know his name is remarkable. Nowhere else in the Gospels are we given the name of someone Jesus heals. Only here.¹³

The last person outside of the small group of disciples we have seen Jesus interact with was a rich, young ruler. He was prestigious and ambitious and influential. We’re never told his name.

This man is named. Bartimaeus is neither rich, politically connected, nor influential. We don’t know his age, his general health, his family, how long he had been blind or why - only that he is a blind beggar.

But there is something about this story we need to see. Bartimaeus has something to tell us.

¹² Mark includes phrase “the son of Timaeus” for his Gentile readers who would not have recognized that “bar” was the Hebrew word for “son.”

¹³ Neither Matthew nor Luke (who both record the miracle) record the name. Matthew tells us that there were two blind men, which Mark doesn’t contradict. He only names Bartimaeus. Luke says that Jesus was entering the city of Jericho - and they were, in fact, entering New Jericho as they left Old Jericho.

On this day, as Bartimaeus was sitting there, hoping for charity, he heard the buzz of an approaching crowd. He heard the name, “Jesus.”

“Jesus” was a common name in first century Israel. But somehow, Bartimaeus realized that the Jesus he’s hearing about is the Jesus he’d been hearing about for months and months. Jesus the rabbi. Jesus the healer.

It’s THAT Jesus! Bartimaeus knew exactly what to do. With no hesitation, Bartimaeus shouted in the general direction of the crowd.

Bartimaeus, the BOLD (vv. 47-48)

[47] When he heard that it was Jesus the Nazarene¹⁴ he began to cry out and say, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”

Bartimaeus couldn’t have cared less where Jesus was from. Nazareth, Capernaum, it made no difference. But what Jesus WAS mattered a lot.

Over the years he had heard things about this Jesus. He put two and two together and identified this Jesus as the One his people had been waiting for for centuries.

Bartimaeus knew that Jesus was the Son of David. He was the Messiah. Jesus was Lord.

Bartimaeus didn’t have eyesight, but he had great insight. He saw into the heart of Jesus better than those around him with 20/20 vision. He begged Jesus for mercy.

Notice that there were those in the crowd, probably decent folks on their way to worship in Jerusalem for Passover, who didn’t like Bartimaeus making such a scene. They “shushed” him, **“sternly telling him to be quiet.”**

Bartimaeus was a blind beggar surrounded by decent people who were all about decorum. Decorum doesn’t matter if you’re desperate.

¹⁴ At the first and the last healing miracles in Mark, Jesus is identified as a Nazarene.

It didn't matter to the Syro-Phoenician woman whose daughter was possessed by a demon and it didn't matter to blind Bartimaeus.

In fact, the crowd's "shushing" created the opposite effect of what they were attempting (just like telling a baby to shush) and "***he kept crying out all the more, 'Son of David, have mercy on me!'***"

Here is a man who knows only desperation. Desperate times call for desperate acts, so this beggar begs - ku-omba.

Somehow Jesus heard the blind man's cries over the "shushing." Jesus stopped and spoke.

Bartimaeus, Meet Jesus! (vv. 49-50)

The call of Jesus (v. 49)

[49a] And Jesus stopped and said, "Call him here."

Now, just consider what is at stake here for Bartimaeus.

He has put himself "out there" hoping against hope that this Jesus both CAN do something for him and that He WILL do something for him. All of his apples are in the Jesus basket.

If Jesus ignores him, he's lost. If Jesus just walks on by and doesn't help, he's hopeless, forever blind. He's hanging all of his hopes on the power and the goodness of Jesus.

But Jesus has stopped and Jesus has called him to come over. All of a sudden, the fickle crowd turned friendly and encouraging.¹⁵

They told him, "***Take courage. Stand up! He is calling for you.***" We wonder if some of them are going to walk him across the road to where Jesus is.

¹⁵ Crowds do that, as any candidate for public office will tell you. And the same crowd that will sing "Hosanna" as Jesus marches into Jerusalem will yell "Crucify Him" a little later in the week.

That's not happening. Bartimaeus was too desperate to wait for assistance. He goes alone to Jesus.

The flight to Jesus (v. 50)

[50] Throwing aside his cloak, he jumped up and came to Jesus.

I'm leaving on Tuesday to travel to Kenya with the organization Dean Chollar leads, Crossway International. Northwest has partnered with Dean for a very long time and Dean has preached here on a number of occasions.

One year - and I was gone when this happened - either going to the pulpit or returning to his seat - Dean forgot about the raised platform and fell down. Dean is blind.

Once, my brother-in-law, Don, was taking a walk on a neighborhood street. City workers hadn't placed barricades around a large construction hole in the sidewalk. Don fell into it and hurt himself badly. Don is blind.

I have tried to imagine how terrifying it would be to walk blind. Always afraid of running into something. Afraid that someone has moved something since you last memorized what was where in the room.

Bartimaeus, ignoring the possibility of obstacles, potholes, rocks, stumps and people in the way, threw aside his cloak, jumped up and ran/stumbled/shuffled to Jesus. Can you say, "desperate"?

At the end of that scene, the blind beggar who had been sitting, pathetic, on the side of the road, is now standing with Jesus. Jesus asks Bartimaeus a question.

Once Blind, now He Sees (vv. 51-52)

Q & A, with Jesus (v. 51)

[51a] And answering him, Jesus said, "What do you want Me to do for you?"

Silly question? I mean, what does Jesus expect that a blind man would want? What would a hungry man want? What would a lame man want?

And of course Jesus knew what this blind man wanted. But Bartimaeus was more than a problem to be dealt with. He was more than a project. He was a person to be pursued and engaged.

So Jesus asked the question. He wanted to hear Bartimaeus express his desperate longing out loud.

Bartimaeus' simple response (v. 51b)

[51b]...And the blind man said to Him, “Rabboni, I want to regain my sight!”

Crystal clear communication. No hesitation at all. “*I’m blind. I want to see.*”¹⁶

And Jesus immediately granted him his request

A healing leads to healing (v. 52)

[52] And Jesus said to him, “Go; your faith has made you well.”

And now we have our new, favorite picture of what faith is all about.

- Faith cries out to Jesus, asking for mercy, over and over again.
- Faith rushes, blind, across an unseen street to get to Jesus.
- Faith expresses the desperate longings of the heart.

Jesus pronounced the healing word - and it was as good as done.

[52b]...Immediately he regained his sight and began following Him on the road.

¹⁶ The New American Standard Bible likely has the sense right in its translation, with “...**regain my sight!**” At some time in the past, Bartimaeus had been able to see, unlike the man Jesus healed in John chapter 9 who had been born blind.

Just as He was drawn to the mother’s refusal to take “No” for an answer, Jesus was drawn to Bartimaeus’ desperate situation and to his desperate cries.

Desperation wins the day. A recurring theme throughout Scripture is that if we would come to God the way God wants us to come to Him, we’ll come desperate.

Conclusion:

Throughout Scripture we find lots and lots of pictures of desperation.

In the Old Testament we find Abraham, desperate, praying that God would spare Sodom and Gomorrah. Hannah, desperate for a child, begged God for that child. David prayed for deliverance from His enemies. Solomon prayed for wisdom. King Hezekiah prayed for victory over the Assyrian army.

But the New Testament also gives us more images than a desperate mother and a desperate blind beggar.

- A few desperate men tore the roof off of a house to get their friend in to see Jesus for healing. (Mark 2)
- Zacchaeus was so desperate to see Jesus that he climbed a tree to get a better view over the crowds. (Luke 19)
- A desperate woman crashed a polite party to anoint Jesus’ feet with expensive perfume. (Luke 7)
- It’s only people who are desperate who keep knocking until their knuckles are raw, keep seeking when they’ve already looked everywhere, keep asking after having been ignored or turned away. (Luke 11)
- In parables Jesus made heroes out of a desperate friend at midnight who wouldn’t let his neighbor get sleep and a widow who wouldn’t give up seeking justice from an uncaring judge. (Luke 11 and 18)

The effectiveness of our prayers is not based on how well we scrabble together the twenty-six letters of the alphabet into an abracadabra that will win a “yes” from God.

He already knows the last punctuation mark of our prayer before we pronounce the first syllable. The viability of our prayers has much more to do with *intensity* than *vocabulary*.

God doesn't want us to come to Him in prayer because, well, we know we really ought to pray. He wants us to come to Him hungry for what only He can provide.

We can provide for ourselves the food we need to stay alive. But we can't fill the emptiness inside. Only He can do that.

Here in northwest San Antonio, we can provide for ourselves the shelter and the clothing we need in hot and cold weather. But we can't touch the souls of the people we love with life-changing truth. Only God can do that.

So yes, we can learn to pray more intelligently. And, yes, prayer is worship and confession and petition. And yes, it is good to pray to God alone and it is good to pray with others.

But at its core, prayer is crying out to God. Prayer is our response to the truth that we desperately need what only God can provide. Pray is what we do when we embrace the fact that we are least in control of the things that matter to us most.

Psalm 86:1-17

[1] *Incline Your ear, O LORD, and answer me;
For I am afflicted and needy.*
 [2] *Preserve my soul, for I am a godly man;
O You my God, save Your servant who trusts in You.*
 [3] *Be gracious to me, O Lord,
For to You I cry all day long.*
 [4] *Make glad the soul of Your servant,
For to You, O Lord, I lift up my soul.*
 [5] *For You, Lord, are good, and ready to forgive,
And abundant in lovingkindness to all who call upon You.*
 [6] *Give ear, O LORD, to my prayer;
And give heed to the voice of my supplications!*
 [7] *In the day of my trouble I shall call upon You,
For You will answer me.*