

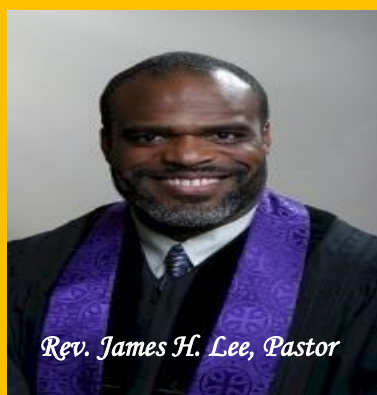
September 11, 2015



NCFA CONNE~~X~~ION!

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## ***Being Real, Relevant, and Racially Diverse!***



*Rev. James H. Lee, Pastor*

NCFA Family and Friends:

I am grateful for my time away and your capacity to live out NCFA's mission without me. I was able to go to new places and have great experiences because of the grace of others and the gift of GPS.

Spiritually, we are led by the Holy Spirit, the Holy Scriptures, and Godly Leaders. After worship on Sunday, we will have a Congregational Meeting to affirm some of the many leaders at NCFA. We will approve our new and existing slate of officers to be examined, installed, or ordained January 17, 2016. We will also vote on our leadership structure.

Please consider answering the questions from our first two New Beginnings sessions (sent as an email attachment from the office on September 9<sup>th</sup>). As we move forward with recommendations on September 27<sup>th</sup>, your participation in the previous sessions and the remaining three (13<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup>, and 27<sup>th</sup>) validates your commitment and right to be heard.

Sign-up for the All-Church Retreat at Mo-Ranch begins Sunday. Plan to attend November 13-15. NCFA members not attending the retreat are encouraged to join Covenant Presbyterian's conversations on race relations on Wednesday, November 11<sup>th</sup>, details to follow. Pastor Thomas Daniels and I will be exchanging pulpits on Sunday, November 15<sup>th</sup>.

We hope to begin our 2016 Stewardship Campaign on October 11<sup>th</sup>, and we continue to raise funds to match the \$15,000 raised for this year's matching grant.

On October 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> you are invited to participate in the seminar "Preferred Pathways" on collaboration and conflict resolution in light of biblical principles, being hosted by Westlake Hills Presbyterian—details included in this issue.

Sunday, October 4<sup>th</sup>, is World Communion Sunday, when we will have a joint worship service with Rev. Nancy Reeves at Grace Presbyterian Church in Round Rock. Please plan to attend.

***God Bless  
Pastor Lee***

September 11, 2015



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*Being Real, Relevant, and Racially Diverse!*



All Welcome

**NEW**

**PSALM 150 PRAISE TEAM REHEARSALS**

**THIS SUNDAY  
IN THE FELLOWSHIP HALL  
9:30AM**

**Just one requirement:  
A LOVE OF GLORIFYING GOD  
THROUGH MUSIC!**

**Congregational  
Meeting**



**SEPTEMBER 13<sup>th</sup>, 2015**

**We will meet to approve the slate of officer nominees for 2016 and vote our leadership structure.**

September 11, 2015



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**NCF**



**READY TO**

**GET ROLLING**

The rehearsals take place in Room 7 during the first 10 minutes of the time when the youth have been dismissed from the church service to go to their classes.

These Sunday rehearsals culminate in a once a month performance that is always on the last Sunday of the month which is known as Family Sunday.

The NCF Youth Choir is open to participants from age 3 through age 20.

The September song will be a modern version of “We Are the Church!” and contains a verse done in rap. Both young children and the older youth will find this song fun to perform!

If more information is needed, please call Connie Jones at 512-947-2869.



**NCFA CHILDREN AND YOUTH MINISTRY**

**VOLUNTEERS ARE NEEDED YOU ARE NEEDED**



PLEASE CONSIDER WAYS YOU CAN HELP SOLIDIFY OUR MINISTRY:

- ASSIST UTOPIA IN THE NURSERY
- ASSIST TEACHERS IN CHURCH SCHOOL
- BRING CREATIVE IDEAS
- SERVE WHEREVER YOU ARE NEEDED

September 11, 2015



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- ⇒ Praise for Salsa Lessons, given free at NCF on Saturdays, taught by the nation's leading Salsa teacher: Robert. Come join the fun. It is a no pressure, high pleasure experience. Plus it is good exercise.
- ⇒ Lift up travel mercies for Richard and Nancy as they travel to Houston this week. Lift up safety and fun for Lara and her attendant.
- ⇒ A big NCF welcome back from Kansas to Christine and Jerry!
- ⇒ Praise the Lord! Lift up Linda for relief from migraine headaches.
- ⇒ Lift up a friend whose husband died suddenly.
- ⇒ Lift up George H. for rest and good health.
- ⇒ Lift up productive conversations between George and Grace this week.
- ⇒ Lift up provision of a responsible baby sitter for Genevieve and Robert's children.
- ⇒ Lift up all veterans who suffer from PTSD. There are several students struggling with college classes and their past war experiences.
- ⇒ Praise for Rev. Bill's sermon: God sees and loves all His children even those in the shadows.
- ⇒ Praise for the Church Women United meeting held at NCF. Special thanks to Pastor Lee, Rev. Jeff and Vi for all their work.
- ⇒ Lift up a friend who is dealing with Parkinson's Disease.
- ⇒ Lift up all couples working through the challenge of maintaining individuality and becoming one in marriage.





September 11, 2015



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#### Session Members

\***Rev. James Lee**  
Pastor/Moderator  
\***Elder Kathy Smith**  
Clerk of Session  
\***Rev. Bill Harris**  
Administration & Personnel  
\***Elder Tim Lenz**  
Buildings & Grounds  
\***Elder Mary Jo Mojica**  
Congregational Life  
\***Elder Randy Mojica**  
Children and Youth  
\***Elder Cathy Angell**  
Discipleship & Women's Ministry  
\***Elder Caly Fernandez**  
Evangelism  
\***Elder Tracey Lenz**  
Finance & Stewardship  
\***Elder Robert Booth**  
Lay Ministry  
\***Elder Benton Hooks**  
Men's Ministry  
\***Elder Vernon Bailey**  
Missions  
\***Elder Charles Robinson**  
Worship & Membership

#### Deacons

Connie Jones, Chair  
Kathryn Aldas  
Ulysses Cox  
Naomi Jones  
Samuel Okyere Mireku  
Lucy Oglesby  
Ashley Phillips  
Carol Saddington  
Cathy Trifiro  
Roxann Vallejo

3<sup>rd</sup> Greg Buford  
4<sup>th</sup> Sofia Bohn-Hall  
5<sup>th</sup> Kathy Smith  
8<sup>th</sup> Dorrette Ayensu  
12<sup>th</sup> Joe Parsons  
Miranda Cortez  
16<sup>th</sup> Charlie Shin  
17<sup>th</sup> Kim Parsons  
18<sup>th</sup> Ricky Palacios  
Jace Lopez  
20<sup>th</sup> Paula Akujor  
Paul Akujor  
22<sup>nd</sup> Juan Ortiz ("Junior")  
24<sup>th</sup> Precious Hernandez  
25<sup>th</sup> Carol Nemir  
26<sup>th</sup> Clarke Spinks  
Kellcee Justice  
27<sup>th</sup> Cheyenne Hernandez  
28<sup>th</sup> Elena Endres  
JoJo Akujor  
29<sup>th</sup> Erin Grisdale

1<sup>st</sup> Comfort Agbahu and Kofi Vida-Torku  
2<sup>nd</sup> Lucy and Ellis Oglesby  
5<sup>th</sup> Jimmy Bohn and Kimberly Hall  
14<sup>th</sup> Clarke and Maggie Spinks  
15<sup>th</sup> Matthew and Erin Grisdale  
26<sup>th</sup> Doug and Patricia Caroom  
28<sup>th</sup> Bill and Edna Parish

### SEPTEMBER 2015

13<sup>th</sup> 16<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost  
8:15am Waller Creek Chapel  
*Sam Okyere-Mireku, preaching*  
9-10am Adult Sunday School  
9:15am Deacons Meeting  
9:30am Psalm 150 Praise  
Team Rehearsal  
10:15am Worship at 1507 Wilshire  
*Pastor James H. Lee, preaching*  
Sunday School during worship;  
Ages 3-5-Rm 1, Grades 1-5 -Rm 7  
12:00pm Congregational Meeting  
12:15pm New Beginnings

15<sup>th</sup> 6:30pm Men's Ministry  
Dinner, Study at 7pm

16<sup>th</sup> 6:30pm Dinner.  
7pm Prayer and Praise

20<sup>th</sup> 16<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost  
8:15am Waller Creek Chapel  
*Shane Blackshear, preaching*  
9-10am Adult Sunday School  
9:15am Deacons Meeting  
9:30am Psalm 150 Praise  
Team Rehearsal  
10:15am Worship at 1507 Wilshire  
*Pastor James H. Lee, preaching*  
Sunday School during worship;  
Ages 3-5-Rm 1, Grades 1-5 -Rm 7  
12:15pm New Beginnings

September 11, 2015



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# N C F A SUNDAY MORNINGS

## NCFA Sunday Schedule

### 8:15am - Worship Service

Waller Creek Chapel  
41st St. and Red River

### 10:15am - Worship Service

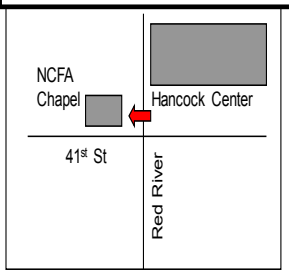
1507 Wilshire Blvd.  
9am Adult Sunday School  
10am Fellowship  
10:45am - Children's Church

## NCFA SUNDAY WORSHIP AT 8:15am -- Waller Chapel

Come rise and shine with us  
at our **8:15am** chapel service  
where we glorify God  
through the Word, Prayer, Hymns,  
and Communion.

41st and Red River, entrance gate on 41st.

In the words of Phillips, Craig & Dean,  
"Come, just as you are, to worship."  
All are welcome to this traditional,  
intimate style of worshipping our Lord.



## NCFA Waller Creek Chapel — Upcoming Preachers

*September 13 — Sam Okyere Mireku*

*September 20 — Shane Blackshear*

*Prayerfully seeking a musician called to join this worship service.*

## NCFA SUNDAY WORSHIP AT 10:15am

We would love to have you and your family  
come share in the CELEBRATION OF  
THE GOOD NEWS!



We are worshipping in the Fellowship Hall of  
Genesis Presbyterian Church on the  
Wilshire Campus starting at 10:15 a.m.

Real Church...  
Real People...  
Real Simple...

New Covenant Fellowship of Austin PC(U.S.A.) is a  
racially diverse community informed by the Bible,  
empowered by the Holy Spirit, and motivated to share  
God's love with all. In response to God's love, we are  
called to equip disciples to faithfully serve, to encour-  
age seekers to joyfully commit, and to implore all to  
worship our Lord, as we love our neighbors,  
grow in grace, and live by faith.

**JOIN US IN THE CELEBRATION OF THE GOOD NEWS**

September 11, 2015



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## NCFA FOOD PANTRY

All are welcome to participate in our *FOOD PANTRY*,  
a crisis ministry initiative of the *Deacons*.



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***“Love Thy Neighbor”***

This month’s special request is:  
Instant Oatmeal and Grits

If you or someone you know needs food, please take some.  
If you can help replenish our supply,  
***UNEXPIRED NONPERISHABLES ARE WELCOME.***

**presbyterian Women**

**October 2, Friday Church Women United will meet at 9:30 AM at Olivet Baptist Church, 1177 San Bernard. The meeting emphasis is Human Rights Day Celebration: “Journey Toward Peace.”**

### **An offer to our youth:**

***I would like anyone under the age of 18 to know that I have \$10 for any child who can recite a Psalm in worship.***

**—Ellis Oglesby**



**Café Justo**

**IF YOU LIKE COFFEE OR  
KNOW SOMEONE WHO DOES**



**Consider supporting the NCFA Evangelism Committee and its partnership with Café Justo to bless this coffee grower’s cooperative.**

**Café Justo** is a coffee grower cooperative based in Salvador Urbina, Chiapas, Mexico. They market a pure organic coffee which is grown, harvested, and marketed in the spirit of justice. Our goal is to provide incentives for people to remain on their family lands.

**Orders** will be arranged through NCFA’s Evangelism Committee. Please see Caly Fernández to place an order. Coffee is available in 1- and 5-lb. bags. The cost of a 1-lb. bag is \$9 and a 5-lb. bag is \$35. Dark roast, medium roast, and decaf are available in ground or whole beans. Coffee are delivered biweekly to NCFA

Contact Caly to make your purchase today! 512-228-4712

September 11, 2015



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***Being Real, Relevant, and Racially Diverse!***

**SALSA...SALSA...SALSA**



**Come on out and join us for some fun, fellowship, and fancy footwork. Each Saturday in September from 6 to 8pm, here in the Fellowship Hall.**



**Course Title:** [Promoting Healthy Choices and Community Changes](#)

**Organization:** Office of Minority Health, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

**Language:** Available in both Spanish and English

**Cost:** Free

**CEUs:** Non-DSHS Certified CEUs for CHWs

**Location:** Online/- e-learning.

**Time:** Self-paced

**Go to** [https://promotores.thinkculturalhealth.hhs.gov/default\\_en.asp](https://promotores.thinkculturalhealth.hhs.gov/default_en.asp)

**More information:** This e-learning program builds the capacity of *promotores de salud* in the U.S. to promote individual- and community-level changes towards good health. It aims to equip *promotores de salud* with the necessary tools to become change agents in their communities.

The Office of Minority Health designed the e-learning program to be used by any *promotor de salud*, regardless of years of experience or the type of outreach in which they are engaged (e.g., nutrition, cancer, women's health). Its simple layout and conversational tone makes it accessible to individuals with a wide range of computer and literacy skills. The e-learning program offers case studies, opportunities for self-reflection, and pre- and post-tests to assess knowledge gained.

[Promoting Healthy Choices and Community Changes](#) is a product of the [HHS Promotores de Salud Initiative](#), coordinated by the HHS Office of Minority Health to promote the increased engagement of *promotores de salud* in health education and prevention efforts.



September 11, 2015



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***Being Real, Relevant, and Racially Diverse!***

**A SPECIAL INVITATION to:**



*The  
Preferred Path<sup>®</sup>  
Ministry*

All Churches in the Austin Cluster, Mission Presbytery (MP) Staff, General Council, and All Committee Members (both incoming and outgoing)!

You are invited to Mission Presbytery's inaugural Preferred Path skills training, to be held October 2-3, 2015, hosted by Westlake Hills Presbyterian Church in Austin, TX.

This course will be led by Dr. Karl Slaikeu, psychologist, mediator, formerly Transitional Shepherd of MP (2014), and founder of the Preferred Path Ministry ([www.preferredpathministry.com](http://www.preferredpathministry.com)), a program that has been in place at Westlake Hills Presbyterian Church in Austin since 2008.

Course summary: This course provides an introduction to collaboration and conflict resolution in light of biblical principles, and provides practical experience with tools for communicating, building consensus and resolving conflict in church, family, work, school, and neighborhood settings.

Key words: Strengthening relationships, positive communication, respectful listening, dialogue, consensus building, reconciliation, unity, conflict resolution, mercy, justice, peacemaking, community life, discipleship, spiritual disciplines, and tools for living.

Format:

Experiential Learning Model (ELM), begins Friday, October 2, 5:30 pm with a light supper, program 6:30-9:30 pm; Saturday, 9 am – 2:30 pm, with lunch at noon.

Topics:

- 1 – What is the Preferred Path (and do I really need this)?
- 2 – The Conflict Grid (a tool for every step of the way).
- 3 – Communicating well (strategies for difficult conversations).
- 4 – Poles apart ('You'll never get these two together!').
- 5 – Resolving conflict (standard solutions in interpersonal peacemaking).
- 6 – Integrating the Preferred Path into Church and Family life (how to keep denial, court, and power plays from ruining your life).

Course Fee: This training is offered at no charge to MP staff, General Council, and committees as a part of MP's enrollment in the Preferred Path Ministry ([www.preferredpathministry.com](http://www.preferredpathministry.com)).

A limited number of slots will be available to members of churches in the Austin community for fee of \$25 per person (reduced from \$95 per person) to cover meals and materials.

Registration: Go to this link to sign up: <http://www.signupgenius.com/go/9040c45a8a82fa75-preferred>

Course Materials: Each participant receives course manual and access to on line follow up tools.

Questions: Rev. Nancy Reeves (Mission Presbytery Transition Team rep-  
[grace.nereeves@gmail.com](mailto:grace.nereeves@gmail.com), or 512-517-7181)

Please be sure to share with all leadership in your congregation!.

*Being Real, Relevant, and Racially Diverse!*

## MISSION STATEMENT

New Covenant Fellowship is a racially diverse community informed by the Bible and empowered by the Holy Spirit. We are called to equip disciples to faithfully serve, to encourage seekers to joyfully commit, and to implore all to worship our Lord, as we love our neighbors, grow in grace and live by faith.

## VISION STATEMENT

NEW COVENANT FELLOWSHIP IMPLEMENTS OUR MISSION BY EQUIPPING INDIVIDUALS TO LIVE FOR CHRIST AND MINISTER THROUGHOUT THE WORLD.

## FOUR AREAS OF FOCUS FOR 2015

1. **Retain and minister to visitors and members through personal contacts, strengthening families, ministry-driven events, and identifying and utilizing the numerous gifts of our members.**
2. **Better utilize social media and other modes of communication to celebrate our ministry, share resources, and organize ourselves.**
3. **Enhance our Children and Youth ministries through mentoring, attending their extracurricular activities, utilizing their gifts in worship, and assisting in the Nursery and Church School.**
4. **Continue emphasizing Marketplace Ministry, celebrating the various ministries within our church and community, and reaching out into the community like the Community Garden and our Health Fair in November.**

## The Six Great Ends of the Church

The proclamation of the gospel for the salvation of humankind; the shelter, nurture, and spiritual fellowship of the children of God; the maintenance of divine worship; the preservation of the truth; the promotion of social righteousness; and the exhibition of the Kingdom of Heaven to the world. (Book of Order G-1.0200)

September 11, 2015



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***Being Real, Relevant, and Racially Diverse!***

## ***“Jesus and the Smart-Mouthed Woman”***

***Mark 7:24-30***

***Rev. Bill Harris***

***New Covenant Fellowship of Austin***

***September 6, 2015***

### **Mark 7:24-30**

*<sup>24</sup>From there he set out and went away to the region of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know he was there. Yet he could not escape notice, <sup>25</sup>but a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately heard about him, and she came and bowed down at his feet. <sup>26</sup>Now the woman was a Gentile, of Syrophoenician origin. She begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. <sup>27</sup>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.” <sup>28</sup>But she answered him, “Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.” <sup>29</sup>Then he said to her, “For saying that, you may go—the demon has left your daughter.” <sup>30</sup>So she went home, found the child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.*

Every now and then, as we walk through the Scriptures, we run into stories that make us uncomfortable, that offend us, that make us question what we think we know. We read that God ordered the Israelites to destroy the Canaanite people—man, woman, and child—and we are offended. We read that Abraham was about to kill his son as an offering to God, and we are offended. Our Scripture today is one of those Scriptures. If you are offended by the title of the sermon, then I must warn you that you will be even more offended by the Scripture itself, which is certainly the most ugly and brutal episode in the New Testament. Not because it is violent but because it challenges much of what we think we know about Jesus as a loving and caring teacher. But if we read the Scripture with a critical eye, we will have an opportunity to locate the wisdom and the truth God has placed there. The ***Book of Mark*** is the most direct and brutal of the Gospels.

This episode picks up where last week’s Scripture leaves off—Jesus is at home in Capernaum and is visited by a group of Pharisees and scribes who have traveled all the way from Jerusalem to “check Him out.” They see his disciples eating with unwashed hands, which their tradition required, and they ask Him, “Why aren’t you guys honoring our tradition about washing?” And Jesus tells his guests that they are a bunch of hypocrites because they have put their tradition above the commandments of God. And they are offended by Him.

Immediately, Jesus decides to go on a long vacation to the coast, perhaps prompted by the Pharisees, perhaps being chased by them. When you read the Scripture with a critical eye, you have to fill in the blanks. ***Verse 24a*** – This was not just an overnight getaway; Tyre is 85 miles away from Capernaum. In those days, there was no such thing as public transportation; if you were poor and you wanted to go somewhere, you walked. It took Jesus almost a week to walk there. ***Verse 24b*** – This points to things we have seen in the Scripture before, that there’s always something hidden about Him, but at the same time there is always a constant revealing of who He is. Every time he would get in front of a big crowd of people, His disciples would say, “OK, now He’s going to say something really important.”

September 11, 2015



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## ***“Jesus and the Smart-Mouthed Woman”***

***Mark 7:24-30***

***Rev. Bill Harris***

***New Covenant Fellowship of Austin***

***September 6, 2015***

And he would tell them a story about planting seeds, or finding a lost sheep, and it would drive the disciples crazy. As soon as the crowd left, they would ask Him, “Why don’t you just tell these people what you want to tell them? Why are you always using these parables, these stories? Why don’t you just tell them flat-out who you are?” And He would say, “If they’ve got ears to hear, let them hear.” And they would say, “There He goes again.”

The idea that Jesus could hide somewhere is pretty crazy. This is well into the third year of his ministry. After three years of healing the sick and raising the dead, driving out demons, Jesus trying to hide out in someone’s house is like Justin Bieber trying to hide out at Planet Hollywood. It’s just not going to happen. I can just see Jesus hiding in the corner, with the big sunglasses, his hoodie pulled down and his collar pulled up, with a latte, trying to be cool. And everybody knows it’s Him. Sometimes Jesus is easy to see; other times he’s not easy to see.

**Verse 25** – And it didn’t work. “But after hearing of him.” That means they already knew who He was, and they recognized Him. Someone left the house and started to tell everyone they could find that Jesus was hiding out down the street. We’re not sure how they knew him. Maybe they heard about how he drove the demon out of the crazy man who lived in the cemetery, or they heard about the healing of the synagogue ruler’s daughter, or the woman with the issue of blood. As for the woman, we don’t know her name, what town she was from, was she young or old, rich or poor. When the Bible doesn’t tell you any details about a person in a narrative, that’s the Bible’s way of saying those details are not important. What is important is she has a “little daughter,” a baby, with an “unclean spirit.” We don’t know exactly what was wrong with this child. In this time, any chronic or incurable illness was thought to be caused by sin, and if the child was too young to sin, then it must be the parent’s sin that makes the child suffer. And the woman falls down at Jesus’ feet, her way of showing that she accepted His authority over her.

But the Scripture goes out of its way to make sure we know this woman is not “one of us” when it says she is “a Gentile, of the Syrophoenician race.” She is not a Jew, she is an outsider. **Matthew’s** version of this same incident called her a “Canaanite”—those were the people the Israelites fought for hundreds of years. Observant Jews would not touch a Gentile, would not eat with a Gentile, would not set foot in a Gentile house because any contact with a Gentile would make them unclean. But here she was, at Jesus’ feet, asking Him, begging Him, to cast the demon out of her daughter. And **Matthew** says they were arguing back and forth. Both of them were trapped in the situation, Jesus unable to overcome the social stigma of helping this outcast, the woman unable to break the chains of oppression and hatred that condemned her and her child.



September 11, 2015



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***Mark 7:24-30***

***Rev. Bill Harris***

***New Covenant Fellowship of Austin***

***September 6, 2015***

You can imagine what the disciples would say if they were there. “How dare she! How dare this woman ask Jesus for anything? This woman had no right to be here. She had no right even to ask Jesus for anything. She shouldn’t even be here. Will someone take her out of here? The Master can’t be seen talking to this ‘Jezebel.’” To them she was a woman on the outskirts of life whose child deserved to be sick because she was a sinner.

If this seems familiar, there was a time not too long ago in this country that a woman had no rights except those given to her by a man. Women were marginalized, pushed out to the corners of society, silenced if they tried to speak, shamed if they didn’t obey the rules that were made for them. And if a woman ever complained about her treatment, they’d say she was uppity, that she was pushy, that she was a “smart-mouthed” woman, that she did not know her place. Which makes it all the more difficult to understand what Jesus is doing here. At first he refuses even to acknowledge her plea, and then, finally, he snaps at her, saying *Verse 27--“Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs.”* And everything just stopped.

Did he really say that to her? Did he just call her and her child dogs? Our Jesus, my Jesus, said that? And this is what offends us. Because it implies that the blessing of God was only for the Jews, the children of Israel. It would mean that Jesus rejected her pleas and refused to heal a sick child. His flaky excuse sounded like a bad proverb. There is no other place in the Scripture where Jesus is portrayed as such a punk, as a bigot, as a troll. It’s as if we can no longer recognize Jesus. In this time people did not have dogs as pets, Jews considered dogs unclean. Even now, if you call someone a dog, you’d better be ready to fight.

But in that moment, something happened. The woman speaks, still stinging from the rebuke. But she is propelled by all the wrongs suffered throughout her life, all the pain and injustice. But she does not return insult for insult, she does not use her smart mouth to injure or fight, she doesn’t contradict the Master, she says *Verse 28—“Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.”* Yes, Lord, but.... And in that moment, everything is turned around. She doesn’t refute the bad proverb of Jesus, she extends and completes it. She says the words that Jesus should have said. In one sense, she “out-Jesused Jesus” because she took the Master Teacher’s lesson and came up with an answer that He could not ignore. It’s not just a word game of “yo’ mama this” and “yo’ mama that,” it’s about her spirit, the spirit that God gave her, agreeing with God’s Spirit. She takes the words of exclusion and condemnation and transforms them into words of inclusion and salvation. *Verses 29-30—<sup>29</sup>Then he said to her, “For saying that, you may go—the demon has left your daughter.” <sup>30</sup>So she went home, found the child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.* She was rewarded not because she had a smart mouth but because she had the wisdom to know that Jesus was able and willing to heal her child in spite of the racism, in spite of the pain.

September 11, 2015



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***Being Real, Relevant, and Racially Diverse!***

## ***“Jesus and the Smart-Mouthed Woman”***

***Mark 7:24-30***

***Rev. Bill Harris***

***New Covenant Fellowship of Austin***

***September 6, 2015***

In every deal there's some stuff that's on the table and there's some stuff that's under the table. The stuff on the table everybody sees, but the stuff under the table is only for those who can't get a seat at the table. “Under the table”—out of sight, unknown, in the shadows. She speaks from her experience of life in the shadows. In the Scriptures these are shadow people. They still exist. Homeless people are shadow people. Children, people in prison, the sick, the poor, immigrants, women—shadow people. With no voice, no standing, no importance, in the Scriptures. And all they ask for is just a little bit of the blessing, of the happiness—the crumbs of mercy. She wasn't even asking anything for herself, she was asking for her child. If we never question how the way we live our lives affects others, we can never completely know the kingdom of God, because that kingdom is made up of other people, even people in the shadows. And the grace of God looks different in the shadows because that's when you really, really need it. The theology of the shadows says, “Yes, Lord, you sit high, but you look low. You hung the sun and moon in the sky, but you also know every sparrow's fall, and you love every one of your children. And you know about me.”

There are a lot of ways we can respond when our problems are ignored or dismissed. We can get angry, we can be depressed, we can decide to fight back with words or actions designed to inflict pain and suffering. The really smart mouth knows the truth and speaks the truth in wisdom. The ancient Hebrews believed that words had power. If you spoke a word, the power of that word went out and accomplished that word. I think when you speak with wisdom, that wisdom goes out and transforms people and situations. It can right wrongs and restore relationships.

Some of you are aware that my wife recently was hospitalized, and during the time before going into the hospital, she was feeling sick on and off for a couple of weeks, in and out of the emergency ward, and the doctors had lots of opinions. Then our daughter Charlene spoke up, and calling upon her wisdom as a nurse, issued her judgment that we should head back to the E.R., which we did. When we got there, she started directing the people there what to do, and things finally started to happen. We just hung on for the ride! She had a voice, and she wasn't afraid to use it. She had some knowledge, and she wasn't afraid to call on it. She had an opinion, and she wasn't afraid to express it. AND she wasn't doing it for herself—she was doing it for somebody else. Now, I would be the last person in the world to say that my own daughter is a “smart-mouthed woman”; but let's just say she knows where the buttons are and she knows how to push them. And I would say to that, “Thank God for smart-mouthed women.” Women who aren't intimidated, who speak the truth in love with words of wisdom. Women who won't back down, who won't quit.

A few weeks ago, I was listening to an interview with Misty Copeland. She is the first African American to become the primary dancer, the “prima ballerina” for the American Ballet Theater, one of the elite ballet companies in the world. She herself is an incredible story, a story very different from the other dancers.

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Most prima ballerinas start ballet at a very early age, as young as three or four years old. It takes a tremendous amount of training, dedication, and money. You have to eat and sleep ballet every day of your life. You spend hours every day in practice and rehearsal. It costs a lot of money for training, and it takes a lot of time. Most have “helicopter” parents who push them hard to succeed.

But Misty Copeland’s story was different. She had five other brothers and sisters, raised by a single mother. It was a tough existence, and nothing was easy. Her mother didn’t always have a job. There were times when the family was homeless, living in motels. She wasn’t a very outgoing child and tended to stay in the background, very quiet. But she had a gift for movement, and incredible physical strength. When she was 13 years old, she spent most of her time at the Boys and Girls Club around the corner from where she lived. The coach of her high school drill team enrolled her in a ballet class. She was terrified of the idea; she had never seen ballet, never heard classical music before. She spent the first three weeks of the class hiding in the bleachers, until the ballet teacher found her, took her out of the bleachers, and started teaching her. That’s when her God-given talent came out. She was able to express herself, without words, in the dance. When she joined the Ballet Theater at 17, she was the only African American dancer in a group of 80. She had to overcome a lot of obstacles in her career. They said she was too short, not enough experience, too many muscles, wrong hair, wrong color. She had to deal with the pressure of people who wanted her to look like all the other ballerinas. People who said she would never be good enough. But she wouldn’t quit. God put some strong stuff in that scared little girl.

Now, she’s at the height of her career. She dances eight hours a day, seven days a week. What you can’t see by looking at her is the fact that she is in pain every time she dances. Three years ago, she received the once-in-a-lifetime chance to dance the part of the Firebird, and the pain in her left shin became unbearable. She had developed shin splints, lengthwise tiny breaks in the bone, and she had six of them. She had to have a metal plate screwed onto her shin. The plate holds her shin together, but it doesn’t stop the pain. Every time she dances, the pain is still there. And It will never get better as long as she is dancing, and may never heal at all.

When I heard her say that, I thought, What must it be like to know that every day, every time you practice or rehearse, every time you leap into the air and come down on that leg, every time you go down a flight of stairs, you run the risk of a disastrous injury that would be the end of everything you worked for, the end of your career, that it could happen anytime, and it could happen with thousands of people watching? Even if there were some way to deal with the pain, how can you perform with that hanging over your head? Where do you find the courage to go out there night after night?

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God put some strong stuff in that scared little girl. Not just strength on the outside but strength on the inside. Not just physical strength but an enduring strength, a strength of spirit, the ability to take what life gives and not be defeated. Don't be deceived by her appearance. She's not just strong on the outside, she's strong on the inside, and that's where you really need to be strong. That's the same strength this Syrophoenician woman had. Not stubbornness but dedication; not carrying a cross but living out a calling.

I believe God puts that kind of strength in us. Not a physical strength but the strength that comes from knowing that you are precious to God. Knowing that even if you go out there and fall, God is going to catch you because you belong to God. When you're the underdog, you have to risk disaster sometimes. But it's good to know that when that time comes there is a God in front of you, a God behind you, a God underneath and a God above you. Because we have to go out there every day, too. Even if I have to live my life in the shadows, God sees me and God knows me. God has put God's strength in me, a strength that makes it possible to stand and speak a word of truth in any kind of situation.

What makes a smart-mouthed person smart? Well, I think it's smart to know what God created you for. I think it's smart for you to know who you are and whose you are. I think it's smart to speak the truth in love with words of wisdom. And if you do have a smart mouth, or know someone who does, know that even a smart-mouth woman can speak the words of God.

Amen.