



The Sixteenth Sunday After Pentecost  
September 9, 2018

## Everything I Need To Know About Church I Learned From the Steelers

### MARK 7:24-37

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Jesus left that place and went to the vicinity of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know it; yet he could not keep his presence secret. In fact, as soon as she heard about him, a woman whose little daughter was possessed by an impure spirit came and fell at his feet. The woman was a Greek, born in Syrian Phoenicia. She begged Jesus to drive the demon out of her daughter.

“First let the children eat all they want,” he told her, “for it is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to the dogs.”

“Lord,” she replied, “even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.”

Then he told her, “For such a reply, you may go; the demon has left your daughter.”

She went home and found her child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.

Then Jesus left the vicinity of Tyre and went through Sidon, down to the Sea of Galilee and into the region of the Decapolis. There some people brought to him a man who was deaf and could hardly talk, and they begged Jesus to place his hand on him.

After he took him aside, away from the crowd, Jesus put his fingers into the man’s ears. Then he spit and touched the man’s tongue. He looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him, “Ephphatha!” (which means “Be opened!”). At this, the man’s ears were opened, his tongue was loosened and he began to speak plainly.

Jesus commanded them not to tell anyone. But the more he did so, the more they kept talking about it. People were overwhelmed with amazement. “He has done everything well,” they said. “He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak.”

### SERMON

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AS IT TURNS OUT, RALLY DAY AT CLC COINCIDES WITH THE FIRST STEELERS GAME. I THOUGHT OF MOVING OUR WORSHIP SERVICE TO 1:00 TO SEE WHICH EVENT WAS MORE POPULAR....

BUT I DIDN’T WANT TO PREACH TO AN EMPTY HOUSE....  
EVEN MY WIFE WOULDN’T BE HERE.

IN PART, BECAUSE TURNKEY SPORTS FOUND THAT THE STEELERS BRAND IS THE STRONGEST IN ITS MARKET OF ANY TEAM IN THE NHL, NBA, MLB, OR NFL.



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NFL FILMS PRESIDENT, STEVE SABOL, SAYS: "THE STEELERS DON'T NEED A MASCOT. THEIR FANS ARE THEIR MASCOT. YOU DON'T NEED A MASCOT WHEN YOU HAVE FANS LIKE THAT. WHEN WE'D GO TO PITTSBURGH TO DO THE GAME FOR THE NFL, WE NEVER BROUGHT ENOUGH CAMERAS."

FAN IS A SHORTENED VERSION OF THE WORD FANATIC MEANING "MARKED BY EXCESSIVE ENTHUSIASM AND OFTEN INTENSE UNCRITICAL DEVOTION." IT COMES FROM THE LATIN FANATICUS MEANING "INSANELY BUT DIVINELY INSPIRED."

THIS DESCRIBES STEELER NATION. IT'S JUST SHORT OF BEING AN INSANELY BUT DIVINELY INSPIRED RELIGIOUS GROUP!

IT ALSO DESCRIBES MEMBERS OF A LIVELY, GROWING, SPIRIT-FILLED CONGREGATION....

A COUPLE WEEKENDS AGO, I WENT TO A GATHERING AT OUR NEIGHBOR'S HOUSE. THEIR EXTENDED FAMILIES WERE THERE AND, LIKELY BECAUSE I AM A PASTOR, ONE OF THE WOMEN BEGAN TELLING ME ABOUT HER CONGREGATION.

ENTHUSIASTICALLY, SHE TOLD ME ABOUT THE MINISTRIES IN WHICH SHE IS INVOLVED, NEW PROGRAMS THE CONGREGATION IS STARTING, HOW MUCH SHE LIKES AND ADMIRES THEIR PASTORS. SHE EVEN INVITED ME TO ATTEND WORSHIP. SHE IS A FAN OF HER CONGREGATION!

JUST AS STEELER NATION IS STRONG BECAUSE OF THE INTENSE DEVOTION OF ITS FANATICS, A CONGREGATION IS AS STRONG AS THE ENTHUSIASM OF ITS MEMBERS. ITS FANBASE, IF YOU WILL....

WITH THE END OF THE PRESEASON ON AUGUST 30TH, GENE COLLIER, SPORTS WRITER FOR THE POST-GAZETTE, WROTE: "THE ANNUAL TUSSLE FOR LIMITED SPACE AT THE MARGINS OF TWO PRO FOOTBALL ROSTERS PLAYED OUT THURSDAY NIGHT BEFORE A HEINZ FIELD CROWD BARELY LARGER THAN A SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA...."

THE SIZE OF A CROWD DOES MATTER, WHETHER A STEELERS GAME OR A WORSHIP SERVICE. THERE IS A TIPPING POINT WHERE ATTENDANCE FEELS DEPRESSING, LIFELESS, UNINSPIRING, AND DEAD. THERE IS A TIPPING POINT WHERE ATTENDANCE FEELS ENCOURAGING, UPLIFTING, INSPIRING, AND LIFE-GIVING.

YOU ARE THE CONGREGATION. WE NEED YOU HERE, ATTENDING YOUR HOME GAMES, CHEERING US ON, SPEAKING POSITIVELY AND ENTHUSIASTICALLY ABOUT CLC....

BUT, IT IS UP TO THE STAFF AND LEADERSHIP TO MAKE SURE SOMETHING IS HAPPENING THAT YOU CAN BE ENTHUSIASTIC ABOUT. IF YOU'RE GOING TO INVEST YOUR TIME AND ENERGY, YOU DESERVE QUALITY. AND HOPEFULLY, THIS MORNING YOU ARE CATCHING THE SENSE THAT IT'S NOT JUST THE SAME OLD THING AT CLC. IF YOU REMAIN ENTHUSIASTIC AND SUPPORTIVE, I GUARANTEE IT WILL ONLY GET BETTER....



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NOW LET ME TAKE A GUESS. YOU DON'T HAVE ANYTHING SCHEDULED AT 1:00 TODAY EXCEPT THE STEELERS GAME. ARE YOU GOING TO A MOVIE? NO. MOWING THE LAWN? PROBABLY NOT. TAKING A NAP? DOUBTFUL. GOING TO VISIT THE IN-LAWS IN SCRANTON? RIGHT.

YOU WILL EITHER DRIVE TO THE GAME IN CLEVELAND (BUT WHO WANTS TO GO TO CLEVELAND?) OR YOU WILL PLANT YOURSELF IN FRONT OF THE LARGEST TV SCREEN YOU CAN FIND.

THE STEELERS GAME IS A PRIORITY. YOU ORGANIZE YOUR SCHEDULE, DARE I SAY, YOUR LIFE AROUND IT.

WHAT ABOUT THE SAME PRIORITY FOR SUNDAY MORNING? BUILDING IT INTO YOUR SCHEDULE. SUNDAY MORNING WORSHIP AT 9:30. SUNDAY AFTERNOON STEELERS AT 1:00. SEEMS PRETTY SIMPLE.

WE ARE WORKING TO MAKE IT EASY FOR YOU. BECAUSE YOUR TIME IS VALUABLE. YOU SHOULD GET SOMETHING OUT OF YOUR INVESTMENT OF TIME HERE. THAT'S WHAT THE STEELERS DO, RIGHT? THEY GET THE BEST PLAYERS POSSIBLE. THEY TAKE CARE OF THE STADIUM AND FIELD. ENTERTAINING HALF TIME SHOWS. ENJOYABLE ANNOUNCERS. CHEERLEADERS IN SKIMPY OUTFITS. IF YOU GO TO THE GAME, THERE'S GOOD FOOD. BEER. CHEERLEADERS IN SKIMPY OUTFITS.

WE'RE IMPROVING THINGS IN THE SAME SPIRIT. THERE'S A NEW SUNDAY SCHOOL CURRICULUM FOR THE KIDS. WE'VE MADE IMPROVEMENTS TO THE SUNDAY SCHOOL ROOMS. THERE'S FAITH AND FAMILY CAFÉ FOR THE ADULTS AT 8:30: FOOD, COFFEE, DEB AND I PROVIDING A LIVELY LOOK AT "UPGRADING YOUR MARRIAGE" TO START OUT. THERE'S A STAFFED NURSERY. A RENOVATED INFANT ROOM. HECK, WEAR YOUR STEELERS GEAR TO CHURCH. WEAR SHORTS AND A T-SHIRT. BRING A CUP OF COFFEE INTO THE PEW IF IT WILL HELP YOU STAY AWAKE DURING THE SERMON.

OR COME AFTER THE GAME. RUN OVER FOR HEART AND SOUL MODERN WORSHIP AT 5:00.

WE'RE ASKING YOU TO INVEST ONE OR TWO HOURS A WEEK IN YOUR SPIRITUAL LIFE, ENRICHING YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH JESUS CHRIST. YOUR INVOLVEMENT IN A FAITH COMMUNITY. INVESTING LESS TIME THAN IT TAKES TO WATCH A STEELER'S GAME. HEY, IF IT'LL GET YOU HERE, I'LL PUT A KEG OF YUENGLING IN MY OFFICE.

REMINDS ME: WHAT DO YOU CALL TWO STEELER FANS WALKING BY A BAR?  
HEY, IT COULD HAPPEN!

BUT, CAN WE PLACE THE SAME PRIORITY ON WORSHIP AS WE DO FOR THE STEELERS GAME?

IN OUR GOSPEL THIS MORNING, WE WITNESS A PARENT ADVOCATING FOR HER CHILD WITH JESUS. SHE WANTS THE BEST FOR HER CHILD. SHE IS WILLING TO SACRIFICE HER TIME TO SEARCH OUT JESUS. SHE INVESTS HERSELF IN THE LIFE OF HER CHILD.



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SHE WILL DO JUST ABOUT ANYTHING TO BRING HER CHILD TO JESUS. NOW THINK ABOUT IT IN THIS WAY: WOULD YOU DROP OFF CHILDREN IN FRONT OF HEINZ FIELD? IN ADDITION TO NOT BEING SAFE, YOU'D BE COMMUNICATING THAT THEY SHOULD BE INVESTED IN THE STEELERS, BUT YOU'RE NOT GOING TO BE. THAT THE STEELERS SHOULD BE IMPORTANT TO THEM, BUT YOU, NOT SO MUCH. YOU'D BE SAYING THIS STEELERS FOOTBALL IS JUST SOMETHING FOR KIDS, NOT ADULTS.

IT'S THE SAME WITH CHURCH. DROPPING CHILDREN OFF AND PICKING THEM UP SENDS THE CLEAR MESSAGE THAT THIS FAITH STUFF IS KID'S PLAY. AND THAT'S IT'S NOT IMPORTANT TO YOU.

WHAT WE KNOW IS THAT IF THE PARENTS DO NOT ACCOMPANY THEIR CHILDREN, EVENTUALLY THE KIDS LIVE LIKE THE PARENTS. THEY DROP AWAY AS SOON AS THEY HAVE A CHOICE. WHAT WE DO IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN WHAT WE SAY.

AND TRUTHFULLY, FATHERS ARE MORE IMPORTANT THAN MOTHERS. IF DAD SAYS WE'RE GOING TO CHURCH, END OF CONVERSATION.

I'M SAYING ALL THIS THIS MORNING BECAUSE, LIKE MIKE TOMLIN, I'M THE HEAD COACH.

IN HIS FIRST 11 SEASONS, TOMLIN'S 116-60 REGULAR SEASON RECORD IS THE BEST START IN FRANCHISE HISTORY. HE REACHED 100 WINS IN THE FEWEST GAMES IN TEAM HISTORY.

OKAY, HE'S NOT BILL COWHER OR CHUCK NOWELL, BUT HE'S NOT CHOPPED LIVER, EITHER.

AND, OF COURSE, WE HAVE A TENDANCY TO SEE THE PAST THROUGH ROSE-COLORED GLASSES.

ANYBODY REMEMBER NOLL'S 1969 1-13 RECORD OR HIS 7-9 AND 6-10 RECORDS IN '85 AND '86?

COWHER WENT 7-9 IN '98 AND 6-10 IN '99 AND AGAIN IN 2003.

COACHES AND PASTORS COME AND GO. NOLL ISN'T RETURNING AND EITHER IS PASTOR GEORGE.

TIMES CHANGE, PASTORS CHANGE, AND A CHURCH CHANGES OR ITS DIES.

AS HEAD COACH, IT IS MY JOB TO DRIVE THE OVERALL VISION FOR THE CONGREGATION: THIS IS WHERE WE'RE GOING AND THIS IS WHY WE'RE GOING THERE. JUST AS TOMLIN ISN'T INTERESTED IN ARMCHAIR QUARTERBACKS, I'M NOT THAT INTERESTED IN ARMCHAIR PASTORS. IF YOU THINK YOU CAN DO A BETTER JOB, GO TO SEMINARY AND HAVE AT IT.

I HAVE A GREAT STAFF OF ASSISTANTS. STEVE SLEPECKI, NANCY GALBRAITH, MO HERBSTER, RHEBA SELEC, SHERRIE LANE, MICHELLE HILLIARD, AARON JACKSON.

AND I CAN GUARANTEE YOU WON'T FIND ANY OF US IN STRIP CLUBS OR GETTING INTO BAR FIGHTS.



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REMINDS ME.

IF YOU HAVE A CAR CONTAINING A STEELERS RUNNING BACK, OUTSIDE LINEBACKERS COACH AND A DEFENSIVE BACK, WHO IS DRIVING THE CAR?  
THE POLICEMAN....

SO ANYWAY, TOMLIN PUTS TOGETHER A STAFF, TEAM AND SUPPORT SYSTEM WHO WANT TO PLAY THE GAME AS HE ENVISIONS IT.

IT'S THE SAME HERE. WE WANT EVERYONE INVOLVED WHO WANTS TO PLAY THIS GAME AS IT IS ENVISIONED FOR CLC. THE STEELERS PULL IN ONE DIRECTION UNDER ONE HEAD COACH.

FOR A CHURCH TO BE SUCCESSFUL, IT FOLLOWS THAT SAME GAME PLAN....

TELL ME, AS STEELER FANS, WE WERE HAPPY WITH THAT 45-42 LOSS TO JACKSONVILLE THAT ENDED LAST SEASON, RIGHT?

OF COURSE NOT. CHANGES WERE NEEDED. SOME PLAYERS WERE TRADED. NEW PLAYERS WERE SIGNED. AN ASSISTANT COACH WAS LET GO, ANOTHER WAS PROMOTED. BIG BEN CHANGED HIS DIET AND UPPED HIS STRENGTH AND CONDITIONING WORKOUTS IN THE OFF SEASON. LEVEON BEGAN HIS RAP CAREER.

JUST GOES TO SHOW. NOTHING GETS BETTER WITHOUT CHANGE. BUT NOT ALL CHANGES ARE FOR THE BETTER.

IN OUR GOSPEL, JESUS CHANGES THINGS FOR THE BETTER BY OPENING THE EARS OF A DEAF MAN. THIS IS NOT A STORY ABOUT ONE DEAF MAN WHO NOW HEARS.

THE DEAF MAN REPRESENTS EVERY ONE OF US. EVERY ONE OF US WHO CANNOT HEAR GOD SPEAKING TO US, WHO CANNOT HEAR JESUS CALLING US, WHO ARE CLOSED TO THE SPIRIT OF GOD.

JESUS DOESN'T COMMAND THE MAN JUST TO HEAR. HE SAYS, "BE OPENED!"

"BE OPENED!"

MEANING, BE RECEPTIVE, READY TO LISTEN, WILLING TO LISTEN, WILLING TO RESPOND.

I HOPE YOU HAVE BEEN RECEPTIVE TO WHAT I HAVE HAD TO SAY. WILLING TO LISTEN. WILLING TO RESPOND.

ON THIS RALLY DAY, I HAVE LAID OUT THE GROUND RULES BECAUSE WE ALL NEED GROUND RULES, WHETHER WE ARE THE STEELERS OR A CONGREGATION.



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AND THEN WE CAN PLAY THE GAME. BUT THE GROUND RULES ARE ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY.

THESE ARE THE BASICS. NOW WE CAN GET DOWN TO THE GAME OF BECOMING MATURE DISCIPLES OF JESUS CHRIST, THE GAME OF RAISING OUR CHILDREN IN THE FAITH, THE GAME OF INVITING OTHERS TO BECOME DISCIPLES, THE GAME OF SERVING OTHERS IN THE COMMUNITY.

THE STEELERS ARE OUR HOME TEAM. THIS IS OUR HOME CONGREGATION. LET'S BE FANS.

## **SERMON SONG**

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FEELS LIKE HOME, BY RANDY NEWMAN (SUNG BY BONNIE RAITT)