

In and Out – Life with Limitations
Mark 7:24-30
Hannover International Worship St. Petri
Hannover-Kleefeld
19.10.2025

*May grace and peace be yours in abundance
in the knowledge of God, and Christ, our Lord.
Amen.*

I'd like to start with a brief poem
regarding who's out and who's in:

He drew a circle that shut **me** out –
Heretic, rebel, a thing to **flout**.
But **love** and **I** had the wit to **win**:
We drew a **circle** and took **him in!**

(Edwin Markham)

Who's in and who's out?

It seems to me that this has become a very important question
for our young people.

When I have a chance to listen to their chatter,
and I admit, I usually don't understand very much
of what is said,

but it seems that there is often this topic
of whom to follow on TikTok or Insta.

Who should be on my list of followers?

Who do I want to send a heart or a thumps up,
or which group should I join?

Not only the young,

we too have our own circles,

fine lines we draw around our properties and minds.

Some of these lines have been given a new, modern name:
they are now often called "bubbles".

And the term bubble may describe even more precise
how much we like to be inside -

Inside a circle of friends or same minded fellows,
a circle with limits and boundaries and borders.

These limits and boundaries -

especially those on a moral or political level -
play a very special role in our world today.

Until now, we thought

that the boundaries between countries and nations
would become increasingly permeable over time;

especially
after the considered insurmountable wall between east and west
was finally opened 35 years ago —
And now we are experiencing the exact opposite:
the construction of fences and new walls
along national borders.
Donald Trump is isolating his country's economy
and still wants to build a wall over 3,000 km long to Mexico.
And in our country, many are longing
once again for strong borders
between those they deem suitable to live in our country,
and those others who should be expelled without delay.
In our gospel reading,
Jesus traveled outside the tight circle of Israel
to a neighboring region.
The people who resided there were called “Gentiles”.
That meant:
We don't want to associate with those..
So why did Jesus leave the friendly confines of Israel
to enter the land of strangers?

Would the circles he drew there
shut out or gather in?
He encounters a mother of a sick child.
This mother didn't think much of respecting boundaries.
Instead, she wasted no time in approaching Jesus.
Well, parents who have a sick child
can become nothing short of fierce.
They'll do anything for their child.
This mother begs Jesus to heal her child.
But Jesus gives her a very rude brush-off.
His reply seems to draw quite a thick
and an unsurpassable line to shut her out.
“Let the CHILDREN be fed first”. -
And with “children” he was referring to his own people,
the people of Juda.
“It's not fair to take the children's food
and throw it to the DOGS!”
Wait, did he just call her a dog?
Commentators have long speculated

on what was going through Jesus' head.
Whatever the reason,
the really remarkable thing here is the mother's retort.
What a fierce lady!
She isn't going to take no for an answer!
If Jesus calls her a dog, she takes it.
"That may be true, Sir," she said,
"but even the dogs under the table
eat the children's crumbs." -
And I hear a lot of anger in her voice.
I guess, all those who listened,
stopped breathing.
It's a needle drop moment.
And after the silence,
that followed the shock of her words,
Jesus finally came to his senses
and suddenly seems to understand.
And he started to praise her for her faith and tenacity.
He tells her that when she gets home,
her daughter will be well.

Now what happened here?
Just where are the lines of the circle falling?
Some circles draw us in.
Other circles draw us out.
We make judgments about one another.
And often, these conclusions are derived
from external manifestations of a person.
Their looks, their race, their gender,
economic status, age, education:
There are so many ways we can draw conclusions.
But here the story ends with a miracle:
The daughter is alive!
And Jesus had understood!
Well, I guess, it really needs a miracle
to force us out of our bubbles,
to push us over the lines,
and to overcome our limited perspectives.
When that happens,
it's nothing short of a miracle;

Living with limitations —
it is something those blind students
who attend the schools of the Hildesheim Mission to the Blind
only know too well.

It starts with the limitations of sight.
However, the limitations imposed on these children by others
are much more serious.
They are imposed from outside.

I would like to tell you about Martongo.
He attended one of our schools in Indonesia.
Martongo graduated with excellent grades.
After that, he began studying theology.
Following the exams, he went on to do his doctorate,
which he also completed with success.
Now he is looking for a job.
He applied to a Jesuit college for a teaching position.
The invitation letter sounded
as if he already had the job in the bag.
During his presentation to the selection committee,
he noticed some restlessness and whispering in the room.

Later the Jesuits told him
that he was no longer being considered for the position.
They argued,
they don't want a blind person be burdened
by such a responsible task.
Martongo offered,
that he would be happy to demonstrate
how he navigates the classroom
and how he organizes his seminars.
But they were not interested.
He learned
that none of his prospective colleagues
would have expected someone
who had written such a brilliant doctoral thesis
could be blind.
The reference to his blindness in his application papers
had simply been overlooked.
Martongo is still looking for for a teaching position
at a university.

Life with limitations!

Like the mother in the Gospel story,
like so many people all over this world:
they all make this harrowing experience:

While human life is limited,
it becomes particularly difficult
when those limits are followed by human exclusion.

Most of our blind students
experience this far too often.

But with the support of the blind schools they learn
how limitations of visual impairment can be overcome.

There are now some really great tools available
and computer based technical devices at hand,
which enable blind people
to live independently and autonomously.

It is the limits of understanding,
the limits of a narrow mind set,
that makes life so unnecessarily difficult
for our students,
and, at the end, for all of us, too.

Living with limitations!

Jesus listened to the suffering mother,
even though she was considered out of bounds at the time.

He responded to her plea;
and in doing so, he overcame the barrier
that existed according to the law.

Jesus exemplifies in this story:

Although our lives are defined by boundaries —
God overcomes them all.

God overcame even the limit of Jesus' understanding.
And that is why we can too.

Excluding and marginalizing people
should never be part of our repertoire of actions.

God's love overcomes all boundaries,
even those that reach deep down into our lives,
the boundary of death.

Even there we can rely:

God's love is boundless.

The mother in the Gospel made Jesus understand.

We hope that Martongo will live to see it.

Let us therefore always entrust ourselves to God's love.

And pass it on, without limits, as Christ did,

Amen.