

The Twelfth Sunday after Trinity  
St. Mark 7:31-37: "The Healing Touch of the Divine Physician"  
September 3, 2017 | Saude & Jerico Lutheran Churches

**In Nomine Iesu**

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O Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who by Your almighty Word made the deaf to hear and the [mute] to speak, we draw near unto You in all our bodily and spiritual needs, for there is none to help us save You alone; and we humbly ask You, touch with Your divine power our diseased members and our corrupt hearts, open our ears to hear Your Word, loose our tongues to speak righteousness, and fill our hearts with the power of Your Holy Spirit, that, beholding the wonders of Your grace, we may confess Your name before men and praise and glorify You, who does all things well, and who lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit, ever one God, now and forever. Amen. (*The Lutheran Liturgy*, p. 155)

*Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. (Rom. 1:7, etc.)*

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*The sermon text for this morning is taken from the seventh chapter of the Gospel according to St. Mark. We read selected verses in Jesus' name:*

Then [Jesus] returned from the region of Tyre and went through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis. And they brought to Him a man who was deaf and had a speech impediment, and they begged Him to lay His hand on him. / And taking him aside from the crowd privately, He put his fingers into his ears, and after spitting touched his tongue. And looking up to heaven, He sighed and said to him, "Ephphatha," that is, "Be opened." And his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. / And Jesus charged them to tell no one. But the more He charged them, the more zealously they proclaimed it. And they were astonished beyond measure, saying, "He has done all things well. He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak." <sup>(ESV)</sup>

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*These are Your words, heavenly Father. Sanctify us by Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen. (Jn. 17:17)*

In Christ Jesus, who has correctly diagnosed our problem and has provided complete and lasting healing, dear fellow redeemed:

Just about every medical doctor who has been in the business for awhile could share a story of a recovery that was nothing short of miraculous. Their expectation for the patient was a far different outcome, and they cannot explain how healing happened. Knowing what we do about the power and mercy of God, these things should not surprise us. Whether through the expert care of physicians, or through a direct miracle, the Lord brings healing to sick and injured bodies all the time.

But His primary concern and work is not to keep everyone physically healthy. His focus is especially on our spiritual health. This may be why He allows us to feel pain and get sick. Our physical problems remind us of our inherent weakness and our need for His mercy. These things drive us to God in prayer, asking that He would grant us healing according to His will. This is what the friends of the deaf and mute man did, and they were able to deliver their

petition to the Lord in person. They had heard what Jesus could do, and *“they begged Him to lay His hand on him.”* Would He help? With a touch and a word, Jesus changed everything for that man in an instant.

## I

Most of us cannot imagine what life would be like if we could neither hear nor speak. We have been able to rely upon and use these senses since an early age. But what we have enjoyed physically, we have not always enjoyed spiritually. Our natural spiritual condition is like being put in a strange and scary place with our five senses nullified. In this condition we were totally vulnerable to forces that would harm us. The Bible tells us that we *“walked in darkness”* (Is. 9:2). Not only that, but Jesus says we *“loved the darkness”* (Jn. 3:19). The apostle Paul spelled out our trouble clearly when he said that *“at one time you were darkness”* (Eph. 5:8). So we *walked* in darkness, we *loved* it, and we were *totally consumed* by it.

This darkness refers to the power of sin in our lives. Even after we are converted by the Gospel and rescued from the end result of sin, the darkness of sin and Satan still hunts us and haunts us. The worst thing we can do is to downplay how vulnerable we are to sin and the devil, who *“prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour”* (1Pe. 5:8).

This downplaying of our vulnerability is often what happens when we self-diagnose our spiritual condition. We might feel the pain of a guilty conscience, and then decide that the best remedy is to point out people who have done way worse things than we have. Or we might do or say something that is wrong, and figure that the proper medicine is to make up for it by doing something nice for someone. We hope these things somehow make the memory of the bad magically disappear.

But when you go to the doctor, do you want him to tell you what you want to hear, or what you need to hear? No matter how much it is going to hurt, you want the truth, because then you can start taking the medicine and getting the treatment you need. Why would you want something different when it comes to assessing the state of your soul? Jesus your Physician knows just how sick you are by nature. He is brutally honest about your problem. You have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23). This sin cannot be made to disappear by any sort of power from men, but only by the power of God.

Of course, some people do not listen to the clear diagnosis of their doctors. They are in denial about their problem and think it will just go away over time. Then it will be nobody’s fault but their own when they become deathly ill. Jesus is very clear and very correct in His diagnosis of your sin. If you deny this, it will not make the sin go away; rather, the infection of sin in you will get worse and worse until the day you die. Jesus said, *“Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick”* (Lk. 5:31). *“Those who are well”* are the ones who think they are spiritually healthy on their own, so what do they need Jesus for? *“[T]hose who are sick”* are the ones who recognize their spiritual condition and ask God for mercy.

## II

Jesus would not be much of a Physician if He just diagnosed our problem of sin, and then left us to fret over it until it consumed us. He gives us a correct diagnosis, and He also provides

complete and lasting healing through the powerful finger of His Word, just as He healed the physical problems of the deaf and mute man.

When we hear about how Jesus stuck His fingers in the man's ears and then spit presumably on His fingers and touched the man's tongue, this sounds a bit like something a magician would do to distract his audience while he performed a trick. This is in reality how unbelievers view the miracles of Jesus. They think that either the miraculous accounts of the Bible are made up, or that Jesus was creating the illusion that He healed people, while the "miracles" were actually rigged. Or that Jesus was practicing some sort of ancient magic that we cannot understand.

But Jesus is a spiritual physician, not a magician. And the source of His power is no mystery; He is the all-powerful Son of God. When God became Man, His human flesh became the instrument of salvation, the instrument for divine activity on earth. So when Jesus put His fingers into the man's ears and on His tongue, that was the touch of God's fingers. And when He spoke, it was the voice of God that said, "*Ephphatha*," "*Be opened*."

But why did Jesus touch and speak? Why not just speak? There are certainly examples of Jesus healing without touch, like when He made the centurion's servant well from some distance away (Mt. 8:13). But there are many examples of Jesus combining a touch with His Word. Sometimes Jesus healed with a touch only (Mt. 9:29). It even happened that some were healed when they reached out and touched Him, "*for power came out from him*" (Lk. 6:19). This power even traveled through the fringe of His garment to heal (Mk. 6:56; Mt. 9:21).

It is little wonder, then, that when sin, death, and the devil reached out to harm and destroy Jesus, they got more than they bargained for. But Jesus looked so weak! He couldn't even carry His own cross. He did nothing when the people ridiculed Him. He just hung there, dying. He was like a helpless worm cast in the water ready to be swallowed up. But as the ancient church fathers said, the worm that could be seen—the human flesh of Jesus—, hid the sharp hook of His divine nature. When sin, devil, and death took the bait, they were caught and could not escape! Jesus ruined their terrible reign, and emerged from the grave victorious.

### III

But how can the healing touch of Jesus reach you today? How can you receive the antidote for sin, which is His holy life and atoning blood? In an encounter with the scribes and Pharisees, Jesus was accused by them of casting out demons by Beelzebul, or Satan. Jesus replied that He casts out demons "*by the finger of God*" (Lk. 11:20), which was a reference to the powerful work of the Holy Spirit (Mt. 12:28). This "finger" is how Jesus continues His healing work today. Jesus puts His forgiveness in your ears and heart when the Holy Spirit brings these blessings through God's Word and Sacraments.

There is a physical aspect to this work, just like Jesus touching the man's ears and tongue. The Lord calls sinful men to be His hands and voice on earth. When the pastor applies water to the head of the baptized, this is really God's hand at work. When the pastor absolves the penitent, it is God's hand on their heads. When the pastor places bread on the tongue and pours wine down the throat, this is Jesus giving His body and blood for forgiveness. Jesus delivers unseen gifts through things that we can see. He would not have to do this, just as He did not have to

touch those He healed. But it is comforting that He does it in this way. The visible sign confirms the spiritual promise.

Most people view these things as superstition or trickery. How could mere words impart actual forgiveness? How could the water of Baptism and the bread and wine of Holy Communion become something so powerful with only a few simple words? Jesus said, *"With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible"* (Mt. 19:26). By the power of His Word, Jesus does give these blessings. Through the means of grace, He applies His healing touch to our sin-sick souls.

Even one little finger of God is powerful enough to accomplish whatever He pleases. All the darkness that Satan can muster cannot stand up to Him, because God's power is limitless and never-failing. This power is at work in your life through the Word and Sacraments. **The Healing Touch of the Divine Physician** costs you nothing, but it does everything for you. His touch delivers your eternal salvation.

*Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen.*

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