

Sermon Trinity 12

August 30, 2020

Mark 7:31-37

In the Name of Jesus ✠. Amen.

This morning we meditate on the Gospel Lesson, previously read. Amen.

This week I read something that resonated well with me. A pastor was talking about how he was out in the midst of the stores shopping, and at a register there was an interaction that caught his ear. The customer said “hello” to the checkout person. The checkout person looked confused. Then customer removed their face covering, to which the checkout person said, “Oh it’s you! I didn’t recognize you with your mask on!” The pastor said at that moment, he knew what he was preaching. You see our God is a God who comes to us behind masks.

In fact, we see it literally said, in the book of Isaiah, **“Truly, you are a God who hides himself, O God of Israel, the Savior.”** He comes in masks now. I was reading a book called “The Spirituality of the Cross,” by a Lutheran writer named Gene Veith. In that book, Dr. Veith speaks of how we serve in vocations to care for our neighbors as people, and as we do that, God Himself is serving them through us as His mask and we are serving Him under the mask of those people. Or I just read a book about Faith in the midst of this Pandemic, where the author of that chapter—a professor of mine from seminary—made the point that God is working somehow under the mask of this pandemic. Of course, it doesn’t seem like such a thing is God’s work. After all, there is great suffering that is happening, but because God is in charge of all things, and because He is loving, we can know that He is working through it, and truly working His good through it somehow.

Finally, though, to tie to our Gospel lesson this morning, we see our God who hides Himself in masks in order that He might reveal Himself. It’s an odd thought, but it’s true. We can’t look upon God face to face and live, and so He covers His face that we can come to know Him and finally join Him in His eternal Kingdom. In today’s lesson, He is showing that He is revealing Himself in the mask of flesh of the man, Jesus Christ. How so? Look at the healing. Here this is clearly the work of God. The man is deaf, and God comes to Him in Christ, and He opens His ear. He looses his tongue. The man can then hear, and he can speak.

So, what do we take from this? We learn that we are wont to find God where He promises to be hiding Himself. We are so drawn to trying to find God where we think is fitting, to finding Him in our own thoughts, or feelings, in nature, and in signs that go on around us. But where does He promise to be? Well, we get a glimpse of that in the

Epistle Lesson, don't we? **“How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? ... So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.”** In other words, we find Jesus in His Word.

But what do we see in this in conjunction with the Gospel Lesson that tells us something we should learn? Of course, there are lots of things to draw from this, but hopefully you know the connection I'm going to make. Look at the Epistle. It speaks of faith coming by hearing, of that faith being in the heart, of one believing with the heart and confessing with the mouth. And what's the connection? We need what Jesus does for the deaf man for ourselves, don't we? We need Him to come to us, to cast His fingers into our ears, to spit and touch His tongue and to say, **“Ephhpatha, be opened.”**

How do we know this? Look at what we as people don't want to hear. We don't want to hear of our sin. We are increasingly looking around us and finding that the world doesn't want to call sin what Scripture calls sin. Pastor Bennett talked about this last weekend. He talked about the book written forty years ago describing all of the things that were taboo then that had been driven out by what could be called a Judeo-Christian ethical worldview. But he said how, anymore, we have adopted so many of these sins hook, line, and sinker. We don't want to hear them called sin.

We also don't want to hear the call to repent that goes along with that. And that includes in the church as well. You can step foot in many churches, you can watch many churches on TV or online, and you can hear little to no conversation of repentance. And yet what's the first thing Jesus said when He came on the scene in His ministry? What did John the Baptist say even to prepare the way of Jesus? Repent! We have to constantly live in repentance. As we look at Covid, as we look at race relations, as we look at the political milieu, we need to repent! As Luther said, “When our Lord and master Jesus Christ said, ‘repent,’ He meant that the entire life of a Christian should be one of repentance.” But our ears are closed to that.

And what else? Well, I touched on our political situation. I think in election years, this gets particularly bad, but we have to hear that we're not going to create a utopia on earth. The world is fallen because of sin, it's not going to be perfect. It's just not. It doesn't matter if we get what we view as the perfect combination of candidates elected in all the right positions, things will still be a mess. Things will always be in tension with themselves. Health care will have its issues where someone somewhere will not get the care they need. Education will always have its gaps and sadly, the children who fall through the cracks. Immigration to a country as blessed as we are economically will

always create a tension between the need to care for our neighbors broadly, and the governments call to care for her citizens. And the poor will always be with us. This doesn't mean we shouldn't try to improve these things, but our ears have to hear that tension of needing to work to improve them and not putting our **“trust in princes, in a son of man, in whom there is no salvation,”** as we always have a tendency to do in election years.

Finally, we don't want to hear that we aren't in control, and our safety isn't in this world. We look around at all of this and in our sin, we begin to think that we are God. We think that if we just figure out the right formula we can prevent suffering death, even risk. We can work all things to just how we think they should be. Of course, there's obvious conflict there, because should things be as I think, or should they be as you think? Right? And certainly I know better than you, don't I, or you know better than I, right?

We need to hear all of this. But our ears are naturally closed to it. They're closed to hearing sin and the call to repentance. They're closed to hearing that God is God and we're not, that He knows what's best and we don't. They're closed to hearing that we aren't ultimately going to find ultimate safety or security or utopia in this life.

But Jesus comes. He comes to you. He casts His fingers in your ears. He spits and touches your tongue. And He sighs—which, by the way, I thought this was neat. This word for sighing is the same word for the groanings of the Holy Spirit in Romans 8. If you remember that passage, it says that creation groans under the curse of the fall, it says that we as Christians groan in awaiting our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. Then, it says that in that groaning when we don't know what to pray, but the Holy Spirit intercedes for us with **“groanings too deep for words.”** That's the sigh here from Jesus. He puts His fingers in your ears, He grabs your tongues, and He sighs, He groans in view of sin, and He speaks. He says, **“Ephphatha... Be opened.”** Ears, be opened. Ears hear the truth.

And your ears hear the truth. They hear the truth that repentance isn't this horrid oppression of self-denial, but the freedom to acknowledge that sin binds and overwhelms us. They hear that this Jesus is the One who frees from bindings, just as He released the tongue of the deaf man. They hear that as we acknowledge our sin, there is comfort. Why? Because this Jesus came to save sinners. He didn't come for the righteous but the unrighteous. He didn't come for the healthy. Look at Him! He's healing the sick! That's who He came for. He came for you. To open your ears that they would hear this message and the message that utopia isn't in this life, but is certain and promised in His Eternal Kingdom. In that Kingdom there are no sojourners, but it is

the eternal home of those who immigrate there by His blood. In the resurrection of the body there, there is no need for medical insurance, medical care. In the worries we have about education now, there will be complete knowledge for everyone gathered around His throne. And there will be no more poverty. The poor we will always have with us now, but there all the children of heaven will enjoy the riches of His provision and care. They will need for nothing. Even He Himself will come to them and wipe away every tear as they have suffered in this life. There will be hope fulfilled, salvation, joy, comfort, peace.

But as I say all of this, I said that we saw Jesus in the lesson accomplishing this for the man in the mask of the flesh of man. Where is the mask by which He does this for you? I mentioned the mask of the Word, and that is foremost. He comes to you in the Word of the Scriptures. He comes to you under the mask of this book with its pages and words. He comes to you in the preaching of that word. He comes to you under the mask of this poor vessel standing in front of you preaching. Not that He dwells in me as Christ, not that I am God in the flesh, but that His Holy Spirit promises to be with me in the work of proclaiming that Word—again not by my sufficiency but the grace of His promise. He comes to you in the waters of baptism, the mask of lowly water as many of you were infants. And then just as He touched the man's ears and tongue in the lesson, He touches you with His body and blood. He contacts you with the body and blood on your tongue under the mask of lowly bread and wine.

And in this He looses that very tongue. He opens your ears with His Word, looses your tongue that you would proclaim Him to the lost and broken world. He makes you a mask by which you serve your neighbor in your vocations, in your care for them. He makes you a mask by which He makes Himself known as you too speak that Word to the world. In other words, He makes you a mask for Himself by which He visits the world as well.

Of course, on the last day, many will look at His return and say, "O Lord, with your mask on I didn't recognize you." But by His grace He has opened your ears to Him now. Cling to the word He speaks then as that Word brings you freedom, brings you healing, brings you the promise of eternal life. Cling to that Word as you seek to cling to Him, because it is the mask He wears to hide so that He can reveal Himself to you. Cling to that Word that would know Him that you would be with Him forever in His Kingdom. Amen.