

Sermon Trinity 12 2021

August 22, 2021

Mark 7:31-37

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. This morning we meditate on the Gospel Lesson previously read.

The Gospel Lesson tells us that as Jesus healed this deaf and mute man, He took **“him aside from the crowd privately, he put his fingers into his ears, and after spitting touched his tongue.”** Now, if we envision that event, it’s quite the picture isn’t it? Imagine seeing the Lord healing this man in this way. He takes him away from the crowd shoves His fingers in the man’s ears, then He spits. And we don’t know where He spit. Did He spit on His own fingers before touching the man’s tongue? Did He spit on the ground? You know, there’s the miracle where He does that. He spits on the ground and makes mud then rubs it on the blind man’s eyes. Is it like that? Where did He spit? And then you can picture Him reaching in the man’s mouth and touching his tongue. Again, it’s quite the picture. And what do we learn from it? Why does Jesus do this? In fact, we see plenty of miracles where Jesus just heals the person. He speaks the word—which He does here also—but He speaks the word and they’re healed. Why this touch?

To be fair, we don’t know for sure. But I think we can make a connection. Think about how important contact is. I don’t know if you’ve heard stories about people who weren’t given sufficient physical contact in their infancy and the issues that creates. You know, you hear about the orphanages in former Eastern Bloc nations where there is an overabundance of orphans and so the ones there aren’t given sufficient physical contact and human touch. In light of that, they grow up with significant emotional and trust issues. Or I think of a friend who for a time had a job where he would commonly only see people once a week. He said that apart from the odd feeling that something could happen to him and possibly no one would know for days, that he yearned so much for physical touch that when someone would just put their hand on his shoulder or give him a hug, there was such an instant connection his brain went, “Wow! This person likes me, they really like me!” And he didn’t mean that in a romantic sense, just a friendly sense. But there was this power to touch.

But so what? Am I saying this in conjunction with this passage to show that Jesus really likes this man? No. I’m making the point to show how there is clearly this aspect where God created us to have fellowship and to have fellowship that is personal, and physical. Again, I don’t mean that romantically, although the one flesh union of man and woman only proves this all them more. But I mean that God has made us to be in

contact with each other. He made us in bodies and made us to have fellowship with each other in a physical and bodily way.

Is that, then, why Jesus made contact with the man in this way? Maybe it's not exactly the reason. But the fact that He did confirms it. It also confirms that fact that Jesus came in a body like ours. Do you ever think about that? Do you ever think about the fact that Jesus had a body like yours? And to be fair, I don't mean that it was necessarily exactly like yours, after all, we all have different shapes and sizes. Likewise, Jesus was male and not female. But have you meditated on the fact that Jesus had a real human body? Have you thought about what that means? On the one hand, have you thought about how He had to have a body like yours to save humanity? After all, that's really at the heart of the teaching that we call the incarnation, isn't it? Jesus had to become man in order to save man.

You know it's interesting how often you see this discussed in the history of the Church. There's a writing from a Church Father from the 300's named Athanasius called "On the Incarnation," there's one from the Middle Ages called "Cur Deus Homo," "Why God Became Man." The Church throughout time has realized the need to meditate on this, to think about why God would come in the flesh, how that had to be for us our sins to be paid for, for God to reconcile us to Himself and give us eternity. We see that over and over again. Have you thought about that?

Also, have you thought about that in terms of Jesus' humanity? Have you thought about how this human body of Jesus breathed air and pumped blood like you? How it consumed food and drink and expelled them like you? It's really impressive to consider the dedication of God to meet us in that way in order to save us, isn't it? And that shows how much He cares about His creation.

You know there are a lot of ideas that get this creation wrong. There are those that focus only on it, acting as though God doesn't exist, or that what we do in this body and life don't matter in relation to God. There are others that assume that the goal is to get out of this body and attend to this supernatural life of our soul that sort of floats around. But Jesus in the body, Jesus who puts His fingers in the man's ears and touches the man's tongue. This shows how much God actually cares for you and your body. It shows how He cares for you and wants you taken care of in the flesh. Think of all the things that you hear in the Catechism: clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, wife, children, land, animals, and all that you need to support this body and life. This Jesus in the body shows that God cares about all of those things.

I had lunch with Pastor Hanson this week, and he was telling me about how he was in a Bible Class where someone asked about praying about these things. The pastor of the congregation was leading the discussion, and the man, who apparently was a farmer said, "Pastor, should I really pray for stuff? Should I really pray for my crops?" And the pastor saw Pastor Hanson with a look on his face indicating he had an answer. And the answer was that. Yes. Look at what we see that God cares for. He cares for your needs and your bodies. It's easy to think that's all too small for Him, that the details of my clothes are too minute for Him to care about. But this Jesus in a human body shows that He does care.

Even more it shows how much He cares because He is willing to touch that which is unclean. I think most of you know enough about the Old Testament to at least know that it talks about things that are clean and unclean. And Jesus in the Gospels makes it clear that ultimately this isn't about whether you can eat pork or not, that having ham won't actually make you unclean, but that it's about sin, that it's the sin that comes out of your heart that makes you unclean. But think about what that means about Jesus and His care for you. It means that in this body He came into contact with that which was unclean, for you. In fact, one of the things that's clearly the most unclean in the Old Testament is death. You don't touch dead things. Why not? Because that's a manifestation of sin. Do I mean that dying is sinful, that it's a sin to die? No. I mean that we die because it's the wage, the payment, the consequence of our sin. And Jesus came into contact with that. Think about that for a minute.

Think about the grossest thing you can. Ok don't think about it too long, because it's gross, but think about how much you don't want to touch something like that. Don't worry, I won't give a concrete example here. I think you all get the point. But now think about how the perfect and perfectly holy God views sin. As much as you are disgusted by the gross thing you're thinking of, God's holiness views sin in a way that see it as way grosser. And yet, to save you Jesus came into this body and died, bearing your sin in it. That's His love for you.

And as this body confirms all this, confirms God's care for you in the body, shows His love for you by entering into that body, He confirms how important that contact in the body is. This Jesus sticking His fingers in the ear and touching the tongue of the deaf and mute man shows you that contact with you is important.

And you still see how important it is. In fact, you still see how important it is in the Church. Think about what makes Covid so hard. I don't mean the illness itself, but all of the challenges that have come with it. Think about the stories you know of people who have been hospitalized with no loved one to hold their hand. Think about how you all

have your own loved ones whom you weren't, or maybe still haven't been able to see, to touch, to hold and hug in the midst of this. It's hard. And it's hard for us as the Church because God has made the Church to gather in person.

You know with my background, that's one of the things that I appreciate so much about Lutheranism. There's this very physical component to worship. There's this understanding in Lutheran Worship that our faith together isn't just this strictly "Spiritual," non-physical connection to God and to each other. Is there that? Sure there is. We confess the Communion of Saints. That happens as we have communion, but it also happens in a way that connects us to the Churches throughout the world gathered around that body and blood of Christ, and it happens in a way that connects us to the whole Church throughout time. I'm sure many of you have seen altars with rails that are half-circles. The symbolism of that is that the other half is in heaven around the throne of Jesus. That we gather with the heavenly host as we have this body and blood. So there's certainly this part where it's not just face to face.

But there's a part of it, too, that is about that. That's why I'm always harping about being here on Sunday mornings. Jesus who heals the man in this way shows us that this connection isn't just about me and Jesus. My faith isn't just about me sitting at home and reading my Bible. Reading my Bible is good, but look at what that Bible says. It tells me that Jesus comes to me in His Word. Look at the Epistle Lesson. What's that say? Faith comes by what? By hearing! And how can they hear? They can hear if someone is sent! That's the pastor. The Church isn't just you and Jesus and your Bible, it's us here. Pastor and hearers, people gathered together around the preaching of Jesus' Word, gathered around His body and blood. That's what this Jesus who contacts this man shows us.

He shows us that He comes in human flesh to save us. He comes in human flesh to contact us and show us His care for this creation. He shows that even still He comes. He comes in this physical Word proclaimed through this visible vessel of clay that is your pastor. He comes in this wafer and wine at this rail. And there He comes and He meets you. And there He touches you. There He cares for you. There He heals you too. In that Word He opens your ears to hear, opens your heart to believe and be justified. There He loosens your tongue that you would confess with your mouth that He is Lord and be saved. There He meets you that He could care for you in your body now. And that in the promise of His resurrection, in the promise of the waters of baptism where He came to you before, that He will raise that body and care for you body and soul forever in His Kingdom. Amen.