

Jesus Has the Healing Touch (Sermon)

A Sermon Based on Mark 7:31-37

Lord Jesus, when you walked this earth you reached out to people and helped them in any need. You brought healing, hope and new life. Reach out to us needy sinners in your Word today. Heal our hearts and lives that are torn apart by sin, and help us confess that you do all things well. Speak to us today in love, for your name's sake. Amen.

A great battle continues in the fight for life. The casualty in this battle is the right of an unborn child to be left alone to develop normally, and to be born. What supposedly is one of the "self-evident" truths upon which OUR nation was founded – the right to life – is the victim in this case. It's been years since our government, "of the people, by the people and for the people," approved the use of RU-486, a medicine designed to kill an unborn baby and end a pregnancy. Those people who find pregnancy inconvenient in their lives can now take a pill to make that bothersome little life go away. Doctors, who historically have taken an oath that says, "First, do no harm," now are empowered to prescribe a medication that will fatally harm an unborn life and make it go away, in the privacy of a woman's own home.

Is it just me, or is our world turning upside down? Medicine used to be for healing, not killing. What happened? Well, one thing that happened is that science in our day has been brought thoroughly into the service of selfishness. The question people ask when they're deciding whether or not to do something is no longer "Is it right?" but rather, "Is it possible; is it 'doable'?" Aborting your tiny unborn baby by taking a pill is one example.

What our world needs is not more scientists to develop more breakthrough medicines like an abortion pill. No, we need someone who can help us find healing and wholeness again. We don't need more killing; we need someone who can bring the healing touch to our lives and our world.

The beautiful little story that is our Gospel lesson for today shows us that there is such a person. **Jesus Has the Healing Touch** that our world so desperately needs. And the story of how he healed a man who couldn't hear or speak shows us exactly how Jesus shares that healing touch with someone in need. He was willing to go beyond his "comfort zone" and minister to a man who was not yet part of the people of God. He acted to preserve the man's personal dignity in a situation in which he could have ignored or exploited the man. He then went the extra mile to communicate God's love clearly with a person who had been left in the dust by normal daily communication. Jesus was willing to use all the resources available to him to open the shackles of infirmity that bound the man. Finally, he humbly kept the focus off of himself and on what was most important: his heavenly Father's eternal plan of salvation. Jesus used his healing touch to ease that man's burden and restore him to wholeness and health.

And he still does. Because he is the living God incarnate in human flesh, he continues to deal with people all over the world today just as he did when he walked this earth visibly some 2000 years ago. I invite you today to look again at the story of how Jesus healed one broken man and

see in his actions the characteristic way he continues to reach out and touch and heal our broken lives. Because Jesus, and only Jesus, has the healing touch our world so needs.

1. He goes beyond his “comfort zone”

This story took place as Jesus was traveling outside of Jewish territory, in a place called the Decapolis, which means “the ten cities.” It was an area east of the Jordan River and Galilee, which had never permanently been under the control or influence of the Jewish people. In going to this Gentile area, Jesus demonstrated that, although he came first to bring the good news to God’s own people, the good news of God’s love and forgiveness is for everyone. And Jesus here shows us that he was willing to reach out beyond the comfort zone of the family of God, because he came to seek and save everyone who is lost and in need.

Mark reports. There some people brought to him a man who was deaf and could hardly talk, and they begged him to place his hand on the man. Jesus’ reputation as a teacher and healer apparently preceded him even to the Decapolis. We can see several assumptions on the part of the deaf man’s friends. They assumed that the way Jesus would heal was by touching their friend. More importantly, they assumed that Jesus not only could help him, but also would be willing to do so. In that assumption they were not disappointed, because Jesus was then, and is still today willing to do whatever it takes to bring healing and comfort to troubled hearts and lives.

2. He acts to preserve human dignity

It’s interesting to note how Jesus dealt with this unfortunately impaired man. Imagine if you will, how this whole scene unfolded from the perspective of the man who couldn’t hear or speak. A group of his family and friends take him and hustle him off to meet some stranger. He is made the center of attention in a crowd of people, everyone pointing and talking about him and possibly no one communicating to him. Whether he knew anything about Jesus or even about what his friends were asking we are not told, but it was a situation in which the man’s simple human dignity could easily have become a casualty within that crowd of people, who may have been more interested in seeing an impressive miracle than in the welfare of the deaf man.

Jesus doesn’t hesitate for a minute. Mark tells us. He took him aside, away from the crowd. There would be no sideshow that day, if Jesus had anything to say about it. His focus was not to do some show-stopping miracle about which people would ooh and aah. His concern was for the man in need, and how he could reach out and alleviate that need. He didn’t treat the man as an interesting case study, he treated him as a human being, created in God’s image, who needed the healing touch only Jesus could provide. That’s just the way Jesus looks at you and me, as people in desperate need of his healing touch, as sons and daughters of God for whom he was willing to shed his precious blood that we might be free from the sin that troubles and binds and hurts us. Jesus still treats you and me with the same simple dignity he showed to the deaf man that day so long ago.

3. He clearly communicates God’s love

What's most interesting about this story to me is the way Jesus went about healing this man. A lot of nonsense has been written about why Jesus went through the motions he did in healing this deaf and dumb man. Mark tells us, Jesus put his fingers into the man's ears. Then he spit and touched the man's tongue. He looked up to heaven and (gave) a deep sigh. It's enough to say that Jesus was not casting a magic spell, nor did he think that there was unusual healing power in his spit, or any other weird idea. What Jesus was doing was communicating to this man in simple sign language what he was going to do for him. It was as if Jesus were saying to the man. Yes, those ears that seem so useless now I will open for you: I will help you spit out the impediment that binds your tongue. I will do this not by magic or trickery, but by praying to the God above us all for his power and help. In the clearest way he knew how Jesus wanted the man to understand what God was about to do for him.

Jesus still goes the extra mile to communicate God's message with us, who sometimes seem to have as much trouble listening to him and talking about his gracious acts as the deaf and dumb man. But we don't have to rely on sketchy sign language. Jesus by his Spirit breathed into the minds of the Bible writers the very thoughts and words he wanted them to write, in order to communicate with us as clearly as possible the love and care and concern our heavenly Father has for each one of us. And then he showed us that love by stepping in as our Substitute and taking the punishment meant for each of us, so that we could hear the beautiful sound of God saying, I forgive you. Come enjoy your Master's happiness.

4. He opens the shackles that bind us

After Jesus had taken the man where the two of them could be alone and had communicated to him as best he could what was going to happen: he spoke the word which changed the man's life, Ephphatha!" (which means, "Be opened!"). That was all that was required to accomplish this miracle of healing, the almighty power of God's command. At this, Mark reports, the man's ears were opened, his tongue was loosened, and he began to speak plainly. Jesus had opened the shackles of impairment that so long had bound the man, and he was now whole and healthy.

When he died on the cross, Jesus spoke that same word of power, Ephphatha, be opened! to the shackles that held us as prisoners of sin. We no longer are bound to fall into the temptations which come our way every day. We have been given the power to resist the devil, through the grace that comes from Jesus Christ. Jesus has also spoken the word of power Ephphatha! and opened our hearts to reach out in love to others, in the same way God reached out to us. We now have the privilege of telling people that Jesus has broken the shackles of sin that bind them as well. He has opened the gates of heaven as a free gift to all those who acknowledge their slavery to sin and trust him to set them free. And if he is willing to meet our greatest need by forgiving our sins, shouldn't we trust him to meet all the other physical and emotional needs we might have as well?

5. He points us only to the good news of salvation

After Jesus with his healing touch restored this man who hadn't been able to hear or speak, he did something very interesting. Jesus commanded the people not to tell anyone. Why? Because he didn't want the focus to be on the wonders he did, so much as on the good news he brought. If

people merely saw Jesus as a miracle worker, they might never see the larger truth that he was God clothed in human flesh for the specific purpose of acting as our Savior and Rescuer from sin and death. So he pointed only to the good news of sins forgiven, of shackles removed.

Even if all the people that day in the Decapolis did not come to trust in Jesus as their eternal Savior, their response to his merciful healing touch was a correct one. They said. He has done everything well! And they were right. Jesus does do everything well. He does everything necessary for you and me to live in the love of God. He takes care of our most important need, the forgiveness of our sins, and he promises to meet all our earthly needs as well, if we are willing to trust his judgment and not rely on our own selves. He brings the healing touch to our lives that only God can give.

May Jesus lead us daily to reach out our hands in love, as flesh and blood extensions of his love. May our hands touch those around us who are in need of healing and wholeness in their lives, so they, too, can feel the Master's healing touch. Amen.