

***Making Whole***

The Twelfth Sunday after Trinity

August 27, 2023

Mark 7:31–37

What constitutes a person who is whole? Is a person who is unable to walk somehow less of a person than all of us who can? If you talk to someone who is blind you may very well meet someone who thinks they are not deficient at all. Indeed, the sensory perception of a person without sight is far above those of us who take seeing everything for granted. One who is unable to hear often has a greater understanding of what is being communicated non-verbally. Those who do not have all the abilities we are so accustomed to are able in fact to live full and fulfilled lives.

But we're all aware, aren't we, when things start failing? The eyesight grows dimmer. The voices you hear are increasingly low tones and not clear speech. When the mind decreases in agility so can be your ability to get the words out clearly. Or it may simply be that your speaking is no longer able to keep up with your mind. People throughout history have done what they could to restore their lost abilities. They have worked hard to heal injuries and diseases.

We know there's something wrong, don't we? We know this world is not what it should be. Even if you are in good health and financially stable, your life does not seem complete, does it? You may be happy, you may feel fulfilled, but you still face difficulties and hardships. Tragedy could hit at any moment.

It would be great if Jesus were around as He was back in His ministry. If you were ailing, He could touch you, He could speak to you, He could heal you. That's what He did on many, many occasions. So much so that people were flocking to Him for healing. He was becoming wildly popular. People heard about Him. People saw what He did. They experienced firsthand His miraculous ability to bring healing.

But in the Gospel reading Mark is showing us that healing isn't ultimately what it was about. To be sure, healing a person was amazing and awesome. The paralyzed person could now live in a way he couldn't before. The person without sight was now able to see a magnificent sunset. The man in the Gospel reading today was now able to hear and he could now speak clearly. But these things were really about something greater, something Jesus was doing that goes beyond physical healing.

In this way those without sight and hearing and those who cannot walk have it right, those things do not determine who you are. There is far more to us than our physical abilities or lack of them. You and I have something wrong with us. In fact we all are infected with a disease that no medicine or surgery or health regimen can cure. All of us have been born into a world that is not as it should be. It is not as God created it to be. It has been diseased by sin. You and I are filled with sin. Jesus did not come simply to heal all those people. Jesus does not come to you to heal you of your physical infirmities. Jesus came to restore. He came into this world to make whole.

This is brought out in a number of ways in the Gospel reading. Mark is alluding to the places in the Old Testament that speak of this restoring work of the coming Savior. One of those places is in today's Old Testament reading. Another way it is shown is in the Lord's command to everyone to be quiet about this healing miracle. Why would Jesus not want people to know that He has the power to help people? It really goes back to what we have already said. This is not why Jesus came. He came to bring restoration. Those He healed were still living in a fallen, sinful world. They were still beset every day by their sinful nature. They ultimately would die. People could not really understand who Jesus was just from seeing Him as a miracle-worker. It would only be through the cross and the resurrection that they would see who He is and

why He had come. In His suffering, death, and resurrection He brings about true wholeness, true healing for the sickness of our sin. The last way it is brought about is through the words of the people. In their amazement, they exclaimed that He has done all things well! He makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak! They were declaring things that were promised in the Scriptures, using here the words from Isaiah 35.

God created everything perfect. Everything was whole, it was all as it was meant to be. Sin has destroyed that. Our sin against our creator keeps us from being whole. Jesus is true God of true God, Himself the Creator along with the Father and the Holy Spirit. He has entered into creation as a man to make things whole. To restore His creation to its original goodness and perfection. But He does it not primarily through healing. These are signs pointing to His true healing and restoration.

So in a way where Jesus used His saliva to bring clear speech to that man, so with a flood of Baptismal water He has made you whole, restoring you to holiness and godliness. Where Jesus touched that man and brought hearing to Him, so have you been the recipient of flesh and blood preachers in your life who have spoken God's word to open your ears to the life-giving forgiveness you need. As Jesus looked up to His Father in heaven and said, "Ephatha!", "Be Opened!", so have you heard the very words of your Lord as He spoke them on the night when He was betrayed, took bread, and when He had given thanks gave it to His disciples and said, "Take eat, this is My body which is given for you." "Take drink, this is My blood which is shed for you."

You may be in need of healing. Even if it's just a cold, you can feel miserable or you may just be feeling blah. Maybe your foot is sore and it's hard to walk and that's causing your back to hurt. You may be suffering from emotional wounds that you need bound up. You may have just been diagnosed with a severe illness. We could all use some healing. And our heavenly Father invites us to pray to Him for that. He grants it in His own time and His own way, we leave it up to Him.

Because, you see, what He has done is brought about wholeness. He has given His Son in order to make things whole again. He has come to restore. What that means is that in the same way someone who is without sight can live a full and fulfilled life, so as we are continually suffering the disease of our sinful nature we are still able to love others and be sacrificial in our actions toward them.

Healing and release from pain and suffering is not the main thing. Living in the full and free life Christ has given you in your Baptism is. Christ giving you His medicine of immortality, His own body and blood, is the main thing. It means that you now are made whole and live in faith toward God and fervent love toward one another. Amen.

SDG