

## **Sermon, Trinity 12**

September 8, 2019 Gospel, St. Mark 7: 31-37  
Immanuel Lutheran Church

Jesus' earthly ministry lasted approximately three years, from his baptism in the Jordan to His ascension into heaven. It was confined, for the most part, to a small geographical area, roughly equivalent to the size of the modern nation state of Israel. Israel is a small country now, at some parts less than 30 miles from east to west. In Jesus' time it wasn't much different.

Jesus focused his ministry in this small part of the world. He didn't preach in Egypt, or Rome, or Asia. He didn't heal the sick in Africa or India. He didn't raise the dead in the western hemisphere, north or south america. He occasionally moved outside the Jewish areas of Palestine, to Tyre and Sidon in the north, and the Decapolis in the East, but most of his ministry was in this small area. Why did he limit his ministry to this small area? Well, Jesus gives us an answer when he spoke to the Gentile woman who kept pressing him to cure her daughter of demonic possession. He said, "I was sent to the lost sheep of Israel." Jesus' was sent to confirm to Israel that their long-awaited King, their Messiah had come to them in the flesh.

But Jesus was also sent by God to reconcile all of humanity to Himself by dying for the sins of the whole world, taking God's wrath for sin upon Himself, paying the penalty for sin for the whole world, past, present, and future. All sins would be paid for in Jesus' death. But the forgiveness of sins, salvation, and eternal life that Jesus' won could only be received by faith.

And in order to create this saving faith which is needed to receive God's gracious gifts, first in the lost sheep of Israel, Jesus showed that He was the fulfillment of all the Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah, from the promise to Eve in the garden that her seed would crush the head of the serpent, the devil, through the promises made to Abraham and David, to the prophecies of Jeremiah and Isaiah, and all the prophets. Jesus fulfilled these prophecies so that people would see Him as He was, the promised Seed, the King of David's line, the Messiah, the Christ.

As the Messiah was prophesied to be a healer, Jesus healed, motivated by compassion always, but even more, to show that God was fulfilling all of His promises in Him. These healings were confirmations that He was who He claimed to be, God's Son, God's Christ, confirmations that He had the authority to forgive sins, to preach repentance, to give life. He preached the Word of the Gospel, working faith in those whose ears He opened by the power of the Holy Spirit, the life-giving breath, the sigh, of God. He then confirmed and strengthened this newborn faith with miracles of healing and controlling nature.

The people needed signs, for although the prophets, especially Isaiah, had pointed to a suffering Savior and Servant, not a powerful worldly monarch, most people were expecting a clearly recognizable Messiah who would restore the former glory of the

kingdom of David, politically and militarily, as well as spiritually. Even the disciples of John the Baptist apparently had doubts about Jesus. So John sent some of his disciples to Jesus to ask Him if He was the expected one, or whether they should look for another. Jesus gave this message to John's disciples to take to him, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. And blessed is the one who is not offended by me." (Matthew 11: 4-5, ESV). By witnessing these signs the disciples of John be reminded of the prophecies of Isaiah concerning the Messiah, prophecies such as this:

"Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,  
and the ears of the deaf unstopped;  
then shall the lame man leap like a deer,  
and the tongue of the mute sing for joy. (Isaiah 35: 5-6, ESV)  
Your dead shall live; their bodies shall rise. (Isaiah 26:19, ESV)

And the prophecy found in this morning's Old Testament reading from Isaiah:

In that day the deaf shall hear  
the words of a book,  
and out of their gloom and darkness  
the eyes of the blind shall see.

which we see fulfilled in the miraculous healing in our Gospel text today, where Jesus heals the deaf and speech-impaired man.

The apostles were also given power by Jesus to do similar healings, as a confirmation to themselves and to others of their authority to speak for Christ. When the apostolic age ended with the deaths of the apostles, so did most of the miracles. As wonderful as the miraculous healings were, they were limited to a particular time and place, the time of Jesus' ministry and the Apostolic age, and to Israel and the places the Apostles visited.

But even though the New Testament miracles primarily employed to confirm God's promises made to the saints of the Old Testament, they are also confirmations and further promises to us who live after the apostolic age, for they direct the eyes of our faith to the day when all who have lived and died in Christ will be raised and completely and miraculously healed, not temporarily, to fall ill and eventually die, as did those healed and raised from death by Jesus during His ministry, but to be healed and given new life permanently, and forever. For Jesus has promised that when He returns in glory, He will call all from their graves, and the bodies of those who have died in the faith will be raised to glorious healed and perfect resurrection bodies, reunited with their eternal souls.

Christians who have died blind will be raised with perfect sight. Those who have died deaf will be raised with perfect hearing. The saints who have died with broken bodies will be raised whole and healed. Jesus' healings prove that He is God, that He has the power to create life, for, He is life--and life abundant, life overflowing, whole, healthy and eternal. In Jesus' healings the world gets a foretaste of the glorious life to come for all who believe in His promises, the promises of a healed and renewed earth and heavens, where He will place His New Jerusalem for His brothers and sisters, that is for you, to live in forever.

So we see, so far, two purposes in Jesus' healings: first, to fulfill the prophecies made concerning Him foretold in Holy Scripture, to confirm the faith of all who look to Him as the Messiah, the Christ. And second, to look forward expectantly to His return in glory on the last day with steadfast faith and hope.

But there is yet one more meaning to be found in the healings of Jesus and the Apostles and we find it in our reading from Isaiah:

“In that day  
the deaf shall hear  
the words of a book,  
and out of their gloom and darkness  
the eyes of the blind shall see.”

The deaf shall hear the words of a book! The healings point us to a book, and what other book can that be but God's Book, His Word, the Bible. The **physical** healings of Jesus point us to the **spiritual** healing that happens whenever you hear or read the Word of God and believe it--a miracle far greater than that of giving hearing to the deaf, or sight to the blind, for the spiritual healing that comes through faith in God's Word is a sign of the final and complete healing of both body and soul in the Resurrection to everlasting life of the world to come.

So that people may hear this healing Word after He ascended to heaven to sit down at the right hand of the Father, so that they would have their ears opened to the saving Word, Jesus appointed apostles to preach and teach the Gospel He taught them. He gave them authority and power, and gave them a unique gift of the Holy Spirit, so that what they taught and wrote for our instruction has the authority of Christ Jesus Himself. Jesus said to the apostles, “He who receives you, receives me.” His Holy Spirit sent them out beyond the geographical and ethnic boundaries of ancient Palestine, to Africa, to India, to Persia, to Asia Minor, to Greece, to Armenia, to Rome, and beyond, to preach the Gospel to the world, to make disciples, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and to keep, to treasure and trust and preserve all that He had commanded.

He gave the apostles authority to appoint other men--pastors-- to continue the preaching and teaching of the Gospel and to baptize and feed His body and blood to their flocks. These undershepherds would **not** be granted the same direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit as the apostles were. They would not have the power to perform miracles of healing as Jesus and Apostles did, but they would have the Word and the Sacraments, and that would be enough. For wherever the Word is purely taught and preached, and the Sacraments are rightly administered, there the body of Christ is, with His Holy Spirit, healing hearts sick with sin, opening the ears of skeptics to the life-giving Word of the Book, bringing light and sight to those living in the gloom and darkness of a survival of the fittest existence.

Our faith in the miracles of Jesus confirm that the Holy Spirit is working in us to sanctifying us, conforming us to the image of Jesus Christ, who, for us, let His own eyes be shut and his ears stopped for us in death, but were opened and unstopped again through the glory of the Father by the power of the Holy Spirit, as the confirmation for us that our heavenly Father has accepted His Sons' sacrifice for the sin of the world and to show the world the future promised to all who believe in the Son of God, Jesus Christ, you and me, and all the saints. We will be raised and healed as our Lord was, if we but keep steadfast in the faith given to us by the Holy Spirit through hearing the Word of the Gospel, to the end of our lives. And to see that we keep us in that faith, God has opened and keeps open our ears to hear the word of a Book, His book, His Word, His Gospel, in His Church. Amen.