

**16th Sunday after Pentecost
September 9, 2018**

**Mark 7:31-37
Pastor Larry Louder**

Let us pray...Lord God, our strength, the battle of good and evil rages within and around us and our ancient foe tempts us with is deceits and empty promises. In your love and by your power, help us in our confusion, and in spite of our weakness, make us firm in faith. In Jesus' Name we pray. Amen.

There is one question regarding Jesus that never ceases to be asked, "Who is this?" It's asked in various forms throughout the Gospels. It appears twice in one section of Mark (Chapter 4): The twelve ask it in awe after Jesus rebukes the wind and calms the sea and the good people of Nazareth ask it in disbelief after Jesus preaches with wisdom and heals with power.

Who is this? The answers are many if only because no one answer suggests it all. Jesus is a prophet, a man who speaks to God on our behalf and to us on God's behalf. Jesus is a teacher, a man who wore our flesh and took our tongue to tell us secrets about God, to tell us the way of truth and life. Jesus is God and Man, at the same time the unique Son of God and unique son of Mary. Jesus is a Savior, the one mediator between humanity and our creator, who came to save us from sin, self and Satan. And, there's so much more.

Today's Gospel supplies yet one more. This Jesus took aside a deaf man with a speech impediment, opened his eyes and released his tongue. This Jesus is a healer.

This snippet from St. Mark is rich. Not simply for what it did to a victim of brokenness but more importantly for what it says about Jesus and you and me. No surprise to you, I'm sure, to disclose this will take three points. First, what and whom did Jesus heal? Then, why did he heal? And finally, what does this have to say about our Christian living?

First, what and whom did Jesus heal? The Gospels are littered with stories. For Mark there are people possessed, a man convulsing, a boy foaming and grinding his teeth, a little girl demonically possessed. There is Simon Peter's mother-in-law, a leper begging to be cleansed, a dead small daughter of a synagogue leader. There's even one place Mark tells us about "all who were possessed or sick with demons." (Mark 1:31)

Other Gospel writers aren't any different. Matthew tells us Jesus "...went throughout Galilee...curing every disease among the people..." (Matthew 4:23-25). That included demoniacs, epileptics and paralytics among others. Luke mentions leprosy and paralysis, a withered hand, a dead only son. And John? His record includes a Samaritan woman healed of her marital adventures, a man thirty-eight years ill, a dead Lazarus, a man blind from birth.

So, then, Jesus healed: healed broken bodies, healed savaged spirits, healed mangled minds.

Impressive? You bet. But why? Why did Jesus heal? On the face of it, often out of compassion or to signal that God's reign, God's rule had come to earth in Jesus. But there's something more – more profound. Recall that the word “heal” has something to do with wholeness.

Why did Jesus heal? To put the ill, the wounded, the living dead the sinner on the way to wholeness, to genuine humanness. At times it was small: cooling the fever of Peter's mother-in-law or eating with Zacchaeus the tax collector. At times it was more significant, as when restoring an ostracized leper to this family. On occasion it was spectacular, exemplified by driving devils out of a mockery of humanity howling among the tombs.

But these were the immediate problems, the obvious ailments. Why Jesus healed was why the Son of God took our flesh – to destroy the hostility, the brokenness that Sin had created. The ultimate healing, the wholeness Jesus had in mind was reconciliation. That is to restore harmony on three levels; with God, with each human person, and with the earth. And, in that way build up a kingdom of peace, love and justice, to make the body of Christ whole.

All of this may be well and good, but so what? Well, as members of the body of the Christian Church, the Body of Christ, healing is an ever-present must. Why? Because the church is human, it's comprised of sinners. Because the organization and each of us baptized into it are in need of reform. Because this church on earth is not the final kingdom. Because as long as selfishness and sin, hunger and hate, corruption and conflict, division and distance, distress and despair, disease and death roam our paradoxical earth and infect our Christian body, Christianity is not yet whole.

Okay, but how does that touch you and me? Truth be told, each of us is part of the problem... but also part of the solution. We are part of the problem, part of the sickness due to our human imperfection. Perfection eludes us all. Yet we are also part of the solution. Some are called to imagine Jesus the healer by confronting physical or psychological sickness. Some are called to shed light on the ways that we might better care for this earth we are to revere. In our imperfect world, imperfect church, all healing is a way to wholeness and the more whole we are, the richer the possibility of oneness with Jesus. You and I, as Children of the Heavenly Father, are healers---wounded healers to be sure---but healers nevertheless. To heal is the vocation of each of us if we are to imagine Jesus.

So, you see, you really don't have to go to medical school. You can just go the clinic Jesus sets up every Lord's Day and there learn of your own healing and how you can heal others, especially the vulnerable. You can be a healer in our own relationships, in your home, at work, on the turf you trod each day. You don't have to go too far to see wounds for which you can bring a healing balm, some word of hope, some act of love and caring, some prayer of intercession.

This means that you bring healing when you employ reconciliation instead of retribution; when you sympathize rather than criticize; when you give a hug of hope instead of a shoulder of ice. When that happens, you will begin to sense a wholeness in your life that has been absent.

One hymn writer put it this way:

Grant that we all, made one in faith,
In your community may find
The wholeness that enriching us
Shall reach and prosper all mankind.
(LBW #360)

Isn't it so?