**Word and Sacrament Healing**

Based on [Mark 7:31-37](https://biblia.com/books/esv/Mk7.31-37)

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The Twelfth Sunday after Trinity

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Today’s sermon is about how Jesus works through created things in order to save people. Somewhere along the way, mankind began to domesticate God. They began to think of God as so perfect and so simple, that he must not use instruments to do things. If you’re going to build a house, you use tools, but someone with supernatural power wouldn’t use tools, he would just use his power.

This is always the way people who are wise in their own eyes end up thinking about God. Deists present God as a “watchmaker” creator. If he worked in his creation, it would be perfect. But it’s not, so what he must have done is put creation together like so many mini cogs in a watch...wound it up and let it run on it’s own. A debate on scriptural inerrancy today has people disdaining the idea that God created the earth in six literal days. And yet, why would he even take that long? If God is all powerful and glorious, why would he condescend to use less than his full power and might to do anything?

The fact that the Son of God came down from heaven, became man, suffered, submitted to crucifixion, death and burial is part of what is called his “humiliation.” The doctrine is this, “Though he was God, Jesus did not always or fully use his divine powers.” The humiliation of Jesus Christ, however, is not only his submitting to suffering and death for our sake, it is also an aspect of the character of God. God uses what is lowly and despised in the world to shame the wise, and what is weak in the world to shame the strong. That is how God acts, it is the way he manages his creation and our salvation.

Enlightened, intellectual, “wise” people have a hard time with what Jesus does to heal the deaf and mute man in Mark 7. It’s not scandalous for Jesus to command the ailments to heal, or even for him to touch the man’s ears and tongue as a symbolic gesture of how he is healing him. Jesus does use ceremony here, as we use ceremony in our worship, prayers, kneeling, chanting, standing, bowing, lifting up our hands, folding hands, elevating the sacrament, making the sign of the cross...all ceremonies that we find useful, and appropriate to symbolize what’s really happening. But many churches dismiss as superstitious, archaic, maybe even idolatrous. Well would they say about Jesus here? He spit before placing fingers in the man's ears...to spit before touching the mans’ tongue. That seems a bit too theatrical, if not unsanitary. Did he think he was going to bring in the young people that way? What’s the point?

There needn’t have been a point to it for a first century Jew in Palestine. Jesus was a stumbling block to the Jews, not because of any ceremony he did, but because he claimed to be the messiah. He claimed to be the messiah, but came in lowliness and did not kill their enemies, but was killed by them. **He was a stumbling block to the Jews because he didn’t fit their conception of the glorious messiah; but he is foolishness to the Greeks because the Greeks thought that God was spiritual, and that meant he was not earthly.** He was spirit, and wanted men to be spirit, and that means that this earth was prison, and the body was just a cage for the soul that longs to be free. To the Greeks of our day, those who believe they are wise, it is much the same.

But God created man from the dust of the ground and after it was watered formed him and breathed into him his spirit. **God was not imprisoning a soul, he was making man in his own image, with the resources of the world that he created and called good.** Yes the creation was corrupted by sin, so that even certain foods were considered unclean. But Christ did not come to abolish that which was corrupted, he came to redeem it and make it good again...so that, even after he rose from the dead, Peter refused to eat certain foods that were considered unclean, but God said to him…”Do not call unclean what God has made holy.”

This man who was deaf and had a speech impediment was corrupted by sin, as is our common condition. But he was a man created from clay and fashioned into the image of God and given breath and life. God loves creation, and he loves using his creation as tools to bestow blessings. **So he spit, likely on his fingers before touching the man’s tongue and ears, in order to heal him. This is not the only time Jesus does this. Elsewhere, he gave sight to a man who was born blind.** He spit in the dust to make mud and then caked it on the man’s eyes, so that, when he washed it away...the man could see again. Jesus tells his disciples that this man was not blind because of any sin, but so that the glory of God could be displayed in him. God created the man, but he waited forty years to send his son create the man’s eyes. Just as he created adam out of mud, so too he finished creating this mans eyes with the same means, the dust of the ground.

At the spring of Mara, the Israelites were thirsty and found bitter water. God showed Moses a log and told him to throw it in the water, and it made the water sweet. It might seem a bit theatrical, or ceremonial, but so be it. **And could anything seem to be more strange than to require circumcision as a sign of a covenant?**  Strange to our sensibilities, maybe, but we do not decide how God should act or do his business of blessing people. And so when Jesus uses spittle to heal a deaf man, it ought to offend our wisdom, but only so that we will readily submit to the foolishness of God which is far better.

And how foolish is it that God would attach his word to plain water, and through baptism and the hand of a minister grant eternal life?  **It’s about as foolish as jesus spitting to touch the ear and tongue of a man to heal him.** But through God’s Word it worked for the deaf man, mud worked for the blind man, a log worked for Moses, and baptism works for the man enslaved to sin and death. Someone might say, jesus can spit on his hands or even in my face if it will heal my impaired ears or correct my poor vision. But baptism doesn’t do anything that I can see other than splash water with words. But baptism does. Baptism washes away sins, and forgives them. And lest we forget, that is greater than any healing of the body.

A paralytic was once set before Jesus, and Jesus didn’t heal his limbs but only said “Your sins are forgiven”. Some of the teachers of the law grumbled in their thoughts saying “Who can forgive sins but God alone.” And Jesus said, “**Which is easier to say “Your sins are forgiven” or “Stand up and walk”, but so that you may know that the son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins”--he said to the man who was paralyzed--”I say to you, rise, pick up your bed and go home.”** // And immediately the man stood up before them, took what he had been lying on, and went home glorifying God.

You cannot see the forgiveness of sin, but seeing doesn’t matter. What matters is the authority of the one who declares it. Jesus said to his apostles after the resurrection...**all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them.”** When the apostles taught salvation, they said “believe and be baptized for the forgiveness of sins.” You may not see the forgiveness in the water, but that’s okay...Jesus says, “Blessed are those who have not seen and have yet believed.”