

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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Anytime we hear an account like this Gospel reading from Mark we see Jesus reveal himself as God in the flesh. Miracles do that. Miracles show us and point us to the truth that Jesus is the Son of God, and he is the Lord of creation who has restored his people and gives them a glimpse of a future glory to come. That’s what Jesus did for this man and what you see for you today too.

Knowing, this, let’s explore this further as Jesus teaches you there are spiritual and physical elements to this miracle which he reveals you today about what he has done for you and what you have in eternal life. Listen again to what your Lord did, “Then he returned from the region of Tyre and went through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis. And they brought to him a man who was deaf and had a speech impediment, and they begged him to lay his hand on him. And taking him aside from the crowd privately, he put his fingers into his ears, and after spitting touched his tongue. And looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, ‘Ephphatha,’ that is, ‘Be opened.’ And his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly.”

Something happens when Jesus intervenes, and Jesus does intervene. He knows your state. He knows what is rightly due this fallen world. He knows the assaults of the devil. He knows what sin has brought about and what it means to live in this world. Outside of Christ there are only, sin, darkness, and death. Jesus though, is the Righteous one. He is the Word made flesh. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning, and the end. Jesus said to Nicodemus in John 3, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

The things of God, the things of life are only heard and understood in faith. A new life in Christ which turns from sin and desires all that is righteous, good, true, and beautiful only comes and flows from Jesus who alone is the righteousness of God. As Christians, you have been called by the Gospel. Your ears have been opened to hear the words of Jesus and know that these words are for you, and they are the words of eternal life. Don’t take that for granted in your life. Always remember who you are as one who has been given ears to hear and a tongue that has been released. Jesus has worked this miracle of faith in your life, and your life lives this faith out every day in what you say and do.

When you hear Jesus, you then can begin to speak correctly. The word used here for “plainly” is the word “orthos” where the words “orthodoxy” right teaching or literally right praise comes from along with “orthodontics” which is right or straight teeth. The man is healed by Jesus and speaks rightly as a Christian does whose ears have been opened to hear God’s word and that same word placed on his lips as Psalm 51 says, “O Lord, open my lips and my mouth will declare your praise.” Jesus intervenes; God speaks. God creates faith for “faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ” as the Epistle reading teaches. God, in his great mercy also gives you the very words by which you speak of Christ and his church. This is called confession. It’s the voice of a loosened tongue set free to speak the words of Christ. It says back what God has said to you. You confess Christ. You, in faith, confess the Christian faith which has been handed down through the ages, this “orthodox” faith.

God has opened your ears and released your tongue. This is the first thing you see from this reading about what God has done for you, and this is nothing insignificant. Lest you forget about this God shows you that you need to have God speak and act to bring you into his kingdom and make you a Christian. The Epistle reading sums this up well when St. Paul by divine inspiration writes, “How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are

they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!’ But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, ‘Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?’ So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.”

Without God preaching to you and using his means of grace, you wouldn’t believe in Jesus. That’s something so obvious, perhaps, yet something easily taken for granted. The gift of faith and being able to speak the things of God is nothing short of a miracle. It’s not really any different than Jesus opening the eyes of man who is physically blind. The blindness, stubbornness, and ignorance of our sin is such that we can’t see God or come to him on our own.

God’s mercy and grace extend to the fact that he takes people, us, who can’t believe in him or come to him and are turned against him because of sin and gives us faith to trust in him and what he has done for us. If that isn’t miraculous, I don’t know what is yet this what he does and he does through preaching Christ to sinners. That’s a wonderful thing yet regarded as foolishness to the world.

The world is scandalized by this because it is scandalized by Christ. Sadly, even well-meaning Christians are scandalized that God is the one who creates faith completely on his own. It may be easy for those who have faith to believe God would save us by his grace alone and without anything we have done or can do but then when it comes to faith, we want to add a “yeah but” to it. We want to somehow claim ownership that we decided, responded with a decision, or somehow play some part however small or miniscule in faith. You can tell a lot too by how we talk about faith. When we talk more about faith or “my faith” then we are in danger of turning faith into a quality in our lives rather than the instrument which receives Christ and his benefits. It’s not to say we can’t or shouldn’t talk that way. There are just further clarification statements needed or seeing how this is spoken about. It also runs the risk of seeing our faith as the cause of things, good or bad, in our lives. For example, “My faith is what healed me” or “this bad thing is happening, I need to just have more faith.” But like being saved by grace alone, if faith is not completely and solely a gift and work of God, then what is faith other than something we contribute to saving ourselves? One of the most common ways of teaching salvation by works today is when faith is seen in terms of our own action.

If faith is a gift, however, and it is, then God grace and mercy are far reaching beyond measure. Faith no longer is about “my faith” but rather faith is all about the object of it, Jesus. God has said to you, “be opened” and he has converted you to believe in Christ unto salvation. He has worked this miracle, and he also keeps you in this faith. With those same things the Holy Spirit gave you faith, the means of grace, he also is the one keeping you in the faith. When you forget that or separate yourself from the word and sacraments you are placing your faith into your own hands again and it will not end well. Faith will die and you will perish eternally. God, though, is able and he will surely keep and preserve in that which he has already given you. God will not nor will he ever fail, he alone is faithful, and he alone guards and keeps you.

The second thing you see in this Gospel reading today is that God not only cares about your spiritual well-being, but he has redeemed your body and will restore it when you are raised up on the last day. Your physical body is important to God because he created you. St. Mark recorded for you, “And Jesus charged them to tell no one. But the more he charged them, the more zealously they proclaimed it. And they were astonished beyond measure, saying, “He has done all things well. He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak.” God does indeed do all things well even as Moses recorded in the creation account of God seeing it was good what he created.

After the fall into sin, creation groans out in longing for redemption. Bodies decay, get sick, are born with deformities, and each breath is one closer to the last. Yet the God who created all things is the same God who took on human flesh yet without sin and entered creation in the womb of the Virgin Mary conceived by the Holy Spirit. God has a body. Jesus is fully God and fully man. His whole life on this earth was lived in obedience to the law of God which the first man Adam sinned against and brought about the righteous judgment of death against himself, his body. Jesus, though, is not defeated by death because he has no sin, no deceit is found in his mouth. The Father laid on the Son the iniquity of us all and by his wounds you are healed. Dying the death of a sinner Jesus redeemed your soul and body. By his

death he has destroyed death and by his resurrection bodily from the grave God proclaims to you that you are forgiven and will rise from your grave too. Salvation and the Christian faith are physical along with spiritual.

Something happens when Jesus intervenes. He restores what has been broken and tainted by sin. He sets free those who were in bondage to sin and its consequences. He preaches the truth which sets you free for he himself is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. He works miracles. The miracles of healing like this one point you to the future when you no longer will face sin and all its ramifications. Jesus came into the world and things happened. There is no surprise when Jesus opens this man's eyes and unlooses his tongue when we listen to the Scriptures. He is the one promised by the prophet 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 meek shall obtain fresh joy in the Lord, and the poor among mankind shall exult in the Holy One of Israel." The Lord will raise you to immortality and incorruption. No more suffering. No more sickness. No more disabilities. No more dying. All will be gone, and, in their place, there will be life eternal.

Dear people of God, hear these words of God today. Repent of your sin and humble yourself before the Lord. Live out your life in the words of the Gradual, "I will bless the Lord at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth. My soul makes its boast in the Lord; let the humble hear and be glad." Behold your Lord in the flesh. See Jesus and what wonders he has done in healing and this man and rejoice that he has done miraculous things for you too. He has redeemed you by his blood. He has given you faith which clings to him. He will raise your body up on the Last Day. He does all things well now and forever.

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