

Trinity 12  
 August 30, 2009  
 Is. 29:17-24; 2 Cor. 3:4-11; Mark 7:31-37

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*Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.*

**Mark 7:31 Then he returned from the region of Tyre and went through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis.32 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. 33 And taking him aside from the crowd privately, he put his fingers into his ears, and after spitting touched his tongue. 34 And looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, “Ephphatha,” that is, “Be opened.” 35 And his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. 36 And Jesus charged them to tell no one. But the more he charged them, the more zealously they proclaimed it.37 And they were astonished beyond measure, saying, “He has done all things well. He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak.” (ESV)**

Have our minds been transformed by the Word of God or has our thinking been transformed by the world to conform to its view of life? Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. While these are fine words for our country; has the pursuit of the fickle feeling of happiness become our god? Has our desire for a shallow feeling of happiness or temporal glory drowned out the deeper comfort found in Scripture?

We live in a culture of instant gratification that seeks personal happiness and glory at all costs. “Whatever floats your boat”, society says. “Do what makes you happy.” “It is what it is.” You can observe this from a to z - from certain types of credit card debt and excessive greed - to sex outside of marriage, drugs, laziness on Sunday morning, and unscriptural divorce. This way of thinking and living is all around us. Not only is it in the secular world, but it is also found in many church bodies. Instant gratification and *the gospel of happiness*, small g, are pedaled by many in the name of Jesus.

As of a week ago last Friday, the ELCA, which is the largest church in the U.S that uses the name Lutheran, now says it is OK for pastors to live in monogamous homosexual relationships. There you see the culture transforming the church instead of the other way around. Many church bodies become deaf to God's Word and mute to speaking the truth in love, in order to receive happiness, worldly praise, and external unity.

Others use the name ‘Christian’ to promise happiness, wealth, or instant gratification through healing. You observe this in their teaching and in their worship, which is designed to produce happy feelings. Yes, the desire for happiness and glory is all around us. And on top of the many external influences, it is also in our sinful flesh. Not only does our flesh want to do what makes it happy, no matter what God says, but it wants God to act the way that we want Him to. Are our prayers more like explanations to God that our will should be done, or that we trust that His is best? Let me back up and make two points.

First, happiness is not intrinsically sinful. Second, we are free to ask our dear Father in heaven, as dear children, to perform this or that miracle in our lives. However, there is much that we can learn from our Gospel lesson about instant glory versus delayed glory.

In our Gospel lesson a deaf and mute man is brought to Jesus by his friends. They like the friends who brought the paralytic to Jesus – they, like the crowds that came to Jesus for a free meal – all wanted some temporal instant gratification. They didn't come to Jesus looking for eternal gifts like forgiveness, life, and salvation, but for short term benefits.

But, wait. Didn't Jesus on many occasions give people what they wanted? Look at our text? Doesn't He give the man and his friends the instant glory they were looking for? Yes, but look at the details. Jesus takes the man aside privately to perform the miracle and then charges the crowd not to tell anyone about it. And don't forget there were many people that Jesus didn't give the miracle *when* they wanted it. Sometimes it is Jesus' will to give a temporal miracle and sometimes not. In both cases, God's good and gracious will is being done.

Keep in mind that Jesus didn't come primarily to give people a short taste of glory, but a glory that will last forever. Think about it. All of the people who Jesus healed during His earthly ministry, including the man in our reading, eventually died later in life of something else. Jesus was on the scene not to heal us temporarily, but permanently.

Our epistle says that **“The Letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.”** The Letter of the Law shows us that we are dead in our sins and hopeless to save ourselves by the Law. No matter how hard we try we could never please Holy God under the Law. **For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, “Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them.”**<sup>1</sup> The Law shows us that we commit sin because we are sinners. As sinners from conception, we deserve nothing good from God. We don't deserve for Him to hear our prayers or to heal us of our problems. What we all deserve is temporal and eternal punishment.

Yet, Jesus came to save the “lost sheep of Israel.” **Then he returned from the region of Tyre and went through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis.** These introductory words from our reading show us that Jesus was fulfilling His promise to save the entire world by going through these pagan and semi-pagan lands. Jesus descends, as we sang in the last hymn, to the depth of our fallen humanity to give us more than a little happiness and temporal relief of sin and death. He comes down to earth and takes on our flesh in Mary's womb and permanently silences the Law that kills us. He silences the Law's accusations against us by keeping every Letter perfectly in our place. The Law can make no demands of you that Jesus hasn't already accomplished for you.

And what more does the sinless Son of God and Son of Man do? Though sinless, He covers Himself with our dirty sins. He takes the sinful wax out of our ears that keeps us from listening to the Word of God and places it on Himself. Jesus comes down and gets dirty for us. He doesn't save us by some sanitary abstract thought, but intimately and personally. Think of the encounter in our reading and others in the earthly ministry of Christ. He sticks his fingers in ears before q-tips were ever invented. He gets close and personal with lepers. He washed His disciple's smelly feet. God the Son was made man- He walked, slept, sweat and dwelt among us. He, Who deserved instant and constant glory, was spit on and nailed – naked and bloody – to a tree for the sin of His entire creation. This is why we Christians glory in cross of Christ. There our sins were paid for - salvation accomplished - and our enemies' plots against us finished for good.

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<sup>1</sup> Gal. 3:10

“The Letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.” Our sinful spit covered Jesus and His righteous spit releases us from sin and death. In Baptism Jesus washes you clean of your sins, opens your ears, and releases your tongue to confess His name. He washes more than your feet temporarily, but your body and soul permanently. In Baptism you are born again. In Baptism you are a new creation. Did you catch that? You are a new creation, right now. You have the glory that Jesus earned for you by His life, death, and resurrection, right now. In Baptism, you are healed from sin, death, and the power of the devil, right now. In Holy Communion Jesus touches your tongue with His body and blood, which means, through faith, you have forgiveness of sins, eternal life, and salvation, right now. In Holy Absolution Jesus looses the sin that clogs your ears with guilt and leaves your ears squeaky clean with forgiveness.

The answer to your prayers for healing and deliverance are “yes” in Jesus. The deaf will hear, the blind will see, the lame will leap like the deer. We get a taste of Jesus restoring His creation during His earthly ministry, and we will enjoy the full feast on the Last Day. We may want to see the glory now, but I tell you that you do already have it now and will see it later. Though the happy world doesn’t confess the glory of Christ crucified, they will on Judgment Day. **The scoffer will cease.** Though the world thinks they have life and liberty – only those in Christ really do. Though Jesus never promises us temporal happiness, we are free to know that we have the only miracle we need – the forgiveness of all our sins - in happiness and sadness, in sickness and in health, in life and in death. Depart in Peace. Amen.