

Mark 7: 24-37

In Stockholm, a woman was injured as she rushed to catch a tram. She stumbled in front of the moving tram and was caught beneath it. The police sent for a crane to lift the heavy tram off her body.

While waiting for the crane, a crowd of people gathered. One man pushed through the crowd, crawled beneath the tram, and said to the woman, "Take my hand." As she took his hand, she felt the nearness and warmth of the stranger. This calmed her and prevented her from going into shock. After the crane arrived and the woman was released, she said, "I never thought an outstretched hand could mean so much."

Our outstretched hand can mean a lot to someone who is need, but just imagine what the outstretched hand of Jesus can mean.

In our gospel lesson, Jesus reaches out his hand to touch a man who had been mute and deaf, and it changed his life. But at the same time, the friends of that man reached out their hands together and brought that man to Jesus, so Jesus would have a chance to reach out his hand.

To get a better understanding of God's grace in our lives, let's get a closer look at the three main characters in our gospel story, the friend, the deaf man and of course Jesus.

First the friends. One thing we can say about these friends at the very beginning is they loved this deaf and mute man. They loved him enough to make a special effort to bring him to Jesus. They loved him enough to forget

about their own welfare for a moment, so that this man could experience the grace of God. These men, these friends, were fulfilling what Paul tells us in Phil. 2:4 as he says, "do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others."

And in order for this man to find the salvation of God, his friends become as James says in vs 22 of last week's lesson: "But be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. "

These friends knew they had to put their dream into action. They had to bring their friend to Jesus.

And they did. But what drove them to Jesus? How did they know Jesus could heal their friend?? They had faith in Jesus. They must've heard Jesus before and in their hearing, they believed that this man Jesus could heal their friend. They had faith, they had trust in Jesus.

Luther says in a sermon on this text: " Now you here observe the nature of faith which grows out of the word. For the Word first sets forth to us the mercy and goodness of God; then faith causes us to cleave unto it with a firm confidence, and to obey the Word."

These friends heard Jesus, they understood him to be a man sent from God, they trusted him, so they developed a vision, a dream for their friend, to have Jesus heal him, all because they had faith.

Then these friends shared their faith with the deaf and dumb man. They wanted him to obtain his own faith in Jesus.

The faith of these friends was passed on to this man which allowed him to stand before Jesus with the sure confidence that Jesus would and could heal him.

As we look at these friends, what did we learn from them for our own faith lives?

I think the major point for us, we, the church, the body of Christ, are like those friends in the world today. We are the ones who reach out a hand to the ones suffering from the brokenness of this world, we reach out with a hand of faith in the power of Jesus Christ to overcome this world. We reach out a hand of tenderness, of kindness, of compassion, of healing to all those who are experiencing the burden of suffering in any form, be that death, sickness, broken relationships. We the body of Christ, the church, are the friends for all those people in today's world. Friends who have come to know Christ, who have faith in Christ, who are willing to share that faith that other might come to believe.

We are the ones who reach out our hand so that others might know the love of Christ.

Now for the deaf man. Can you imagine what went through his mind? First of all, he had to believe and trust in what his friends were telling him. He had to go along with them as they took him to hear Jesus. The faith had been passed on. He, I imagined, believed too that Jesus could heal him or he wouldn't have come. Then Jesus beckons him to come to one side, to be alone with him. Standing there in front of Jesus the man could feel Jesus touch his ears, place the spittle on his tongue, then looking at Jesus, he could see him look toward

heaven, then say this funny word EPHPHATHA, then all sorts of sounds were invading his ears; voices, birds. Can you imagine hearing for the first time?

Then knowing that he could speak? What did he say? He looked at the Jesus. What was the word that he wanted to express his, gratitude and the overwhelming feelings inside him? What could he say?

I can imagine all he could do was beam as the tears streamed down his face. Then he saw one of his friends running toward him and the next thing he knew his friend was hugging him and saying to him, "This is Jesus".

From his friends, he received the faith to trust in the power of Jesus to heal him. His faith was strong as he stood in front of Jesus and allowed him to extend God's grace into his life through the word. and touch.

Because of Jesus, his life was forever changed. He experienced God's grace in a powerful way in his life. I think the message we get from this character is one of faith along with the willingness to turn his life over to the hands of Jesus with the confidence that Jesus would act. As we experience the brokenness of this world, as we are led by others to see Jesus, we can learn to fully trust Him with our lives as we surrender them to Jesus. Whatever the brokenness is Jesus meets our needs. He meets us at our point of need, be it frustration, fear, futility, fatigue, failure, sin, guilt, sorrow, broken relationships, whatever is our burden, Jesus meets us with his grace.

Now we turn to the final character in our story, Jesus himself. I think the important point for us to notice about Jesus, was his concern for the plight of this man and his concern that the people who understood that he was more

than a man who performed miracles, he was God's Son sent to earth to achieve salvation for the human race through the cross of Calvary.

He was concerned in an equal way. He knew the plight, the suffering of this man and he wanted to help. But at the same time, he knew what his mission was all about, to bring salvation to all people. So that is why he asked the people, the friends of this man and the man himself, not to tell everyone what had happened.

He wanted to show the people as he neared the end of his journey to Jerusalem, that miracles, and free bread, were just a part of his ministry, his mission was also to bring salvation by the way of the cross. Jesus knows our healing is important, but our salvation is essential. Jesus understood the need of this man as he understands our needs, but he also realized the importance of understanding the salvation he brought by the way of the cross. It is not either or, but both/and as we look at Jesus healing and salvation.

Jesus shows us very clearly that he wants to be part of our brokenness to bring a measure of his grace into it, but at the same time, he wants us to accept and believe that only through him can we obtain the salvation God has, planned for all his children.

He does and will walk with us through the valleys of our lives as seen in the following taken from James Bjorge book, Girded With Truth. "In a little town in

the mountains of France there is a shrine famous for its miracles of healing. One day shortly after WW II an amputee veteran appeared at the shrine. As he hobbled painfully along the way, someone remarked, 'That silly man! Does he think God will give him back his leg?'

The young veteran overheard the remarks and said, 'Of course I do not expect God to give me back my leg. I am going to pray to God to help me to live without it,"'

Yes, Jesus is the Lord of the valleys of life, and the way, the truth and light to eternal salvation for all who would turn over their lives to him. I think as we allow Jesus more and more control of our lives in the valleys as well as on the mountain tops, we will eventually turn over to him control of our salvation. We will allow him to be in charge, to allow his broken body and spilled blood to be our way into heaven.

Not our works, not our high opinions of ourselves, not our traditions, not even our faith is the way to heaven, only the body broken on the cross of Calvary and raised on Easter is our way to the salvation planned by God for all his children.

We can be as the friends of the deaf and dumb man, loving the unlovable in such a way that we bring them to Christ with our faith. Then we can be like that man standing in front of Jesus turning our entire lives over to Him. And we remember not only does Jesus walk with us in the valleys of life and celebrates with us on the mountain tops, but at the same time he is concerned for our

salvation as he wants us to turn our lives completely over to his power. As the crowds said over 2000 years ago, we can say too, "He has done all things well; he even makes the deaf hear and the dumb speak."

Amen