

The Healer: Healing Is a Process

Mark 8:22-26

Isn't that a huge encouragement? I'm so grateful to know Marcio and his story. I love how well he captures how God can heal us both inside and out. And I love that his story shows us that healing can be a process. I continue to pray for that process of healing that God is doing in him.

Speaking of a process, Megan and I moved to Port Orchard about a month ago. We love our new home, we are eager to live in Port Orchard and get to know our neighbors and our neighborhood better. As you can imagine, there's lots of box packing and unpacking. Our home is wonderful, but there are a few things we would like to update and tweak. Last week, I spent a little time updating the garage door openers. The ones that came with the house were older, one of them didn't include the safety trip lasers, and we couldn't buy extra remotes for them, so I went to work putting up new garage door openers.

Now, I'd done this before in our previous home so I thought it would take maybe three hours. But I hit a few snags and it ended up taking... drumroll please... 8 hours. Here's a picture of the finished work. Gaze upon an image of desperation. A few salient things to notice about my handiwork here. Note how the wiring is held up by duct tape. Appreciate how the ceiling support is slightly off kilter because I decided to just eyeball whether it was straight or not. My eyes are crossed. Enjoy the master work of bolting in two uneven places on the support for the opener. I "finished" at 9:30 that night, I was so tired and beat up. But it worked! Now, I have two garage doors, and I still needed to replace the other one. But I had the benefit of learning from all my mistakes! So here's attempt two, two days later. It took a mere three hours! The support is properly squared and measured! The wires are properly held in place by insulated staples! The bolts are in the proper holes! Thank you Jesus!

Here's a funny question: if Jesus were installing garage door openers, do you think he would have to do it twice before he got it right? What if I told you that in one of his miracles, and only one, that's exactly what it looks like?

Let's jump right in and see what I'm talking about. Today we're reading from Mark 8, starting in vs. 22.

'And they came to Bethsaida. And some people brought to him a blind man and begged him to touch him. And he took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village, and when he had spit on his eyes and laid his hands on him, he asked him, "Do you see anything?" And he looked up and said, "I see people, but they look like trees, walking." Then Jesus laid his hands on his eyes again; and he opened his eyes, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly. And he sent him to his home, saying, "Do not even enter the village.'"

This is the Word of the Lord [Thanks be to God]

What a strange story! In fact, this is the only case in all of the Gospels where Jesus performs a miracle that appears to not work, at first. It's also one of only two stories in Mark where Jesus uses spittle in some form to work a miracle. So something different is going on in this story. I want to unpack this a little with you and point out three unusual features of this story.

The first thing I think we should pay attention to is the fact that Jesus is in total control of the situation. Jesus takes the man by the hand, and leads him out of the village. The vast majority of the time Jesus has no problem doing a miracle in public, but here, he's leading him away from the public eye. I think this is an important little detail. It shows us that Jesus is a man with a plan. He's being intentional with his actions, he has an idea in mind, and he going through with his plan. I point this out, because I want us to see that as strange as this story is, we should be clear that what happens isn't random. We might not understand all that's going on, but we should believe that Jesus knows what he's doing and is doing it intentionally.

And that's especially true when we take into account what he does next. Let me ask you, how do you think the disciples would have regarded Jesus spitting in a man's face? What would have been going through their minds? Well, to get some insight I'd like to ask someone to volunteer for an illustration. Is there anyone here who will let me spit in their eyes? How about you? No? I promise you my spit has healing properties. After this sermon I'm going to start selling a new line of health products based around my eye salve spittle. It'll be called Legit Spit, or maybe Drool Fuel. No takers? Okay, I think you know now what the disciples must have been feeling. Everything we know about Jewish culture indicates that, just like we are offended at the idea of being spat on, it would have been offensive for them to see Jesus spit in this guys eyes. Now isn't that interesting. Jesus intended to heal the man, but he intended to do so in a way that was offensive to him and to anybody watching.

The third thing that strikes me as unusual to this story is how Jesus asks the man if he can see yet. When you read the stories of Jesus' miracles, you know that nowhere else does he do this. It's quite the opposite really: usually he declares the healing. "Your faith has made you whole. Stand up and walk. The demon has left your daughter." Those are the kinds of things he normally says. But, "Do you see anything?" as if he wouldn't know all of a sudden, when he did the other times? I don't think that was the case. I think he did know, but I think he intended to ask the question. I think he intended the healing to be a process.

I believe Jesus continues to heal, and I believe that he continues to heal in this particular way in many cases. This is Shannon Rickert, hanging out with John Baker, the founder of Celebrate Recovery [picture forthcoming]. She is the Director of Care Ministries at Chapel Hill and she's been doing a fantastic job for years now, working with our lay counselors and

Celebrate Recovery. I was reflecting with her on this passage and she was struck by how many similarities her story had with it. She gave me permission to share some of it with you.

When Shannon started working at Chapel Hill, she started going to Celebrate Recovery. I say that as though it were simple, but what Shannon told me is that she initially only did it because it was required of her. She told he she initially came and saw some people smoking outside the church and said, "That is not who I am." I love how honest she was to me about where she was at! She first went to Summit, which is the big national Celebrate Recover conference that happens every year, and

there and saw that God was doing great things! She felt like maybe he was leading her to go through the process. This was very much like Jesus was taking her hand and leading out of the village, out of her comfort zone, away from what she was used to. Jesus had a plan for Shannon! And it was through something that she initially found offensive. You could say that coming to Celebrate Recovery was in the spit-in-the-eyes school of Jesus healing. And heal he did. But for Shannon, as for this blind man, her healing was a process. She came to Celebrate Recovery and she did a step study, and at the end of that she had found some healing. She took a break from Celebrate Recovery, from the step study, and in Shannon's mind, she was good to go. Check that off the list! But, after that she took on more responsibilities at CR, and as she re-engaged she began to realize that her healing wasn't done. In his own way, Jesus began asking her, "Can you see yet?" and Shannon had to realize she couldn't see as clearly as she thought. He showed her that there was more healing to be done, more obedience, more trust. And God has done more healing and restoration in her than she thought was possible.

For Shannon, and for Marcio too, healing has been a process. And I think Jesus leads some of us to healing through a process on purpose. But why? I think we can establish that Jesus intentionally did this with the blind man, and he continues to do it today, but to what end? Healing is a process... why?

To find out, we need to revisit our passage, but we need more context. A lot more. So stick with me here, we're going to follow some clues to find out why Jesus made all these strange choices.

Our first clue is from Isaiah 35:5. To the Jews of Jesus' day, this passage was widely understood as a Messianic one. In other words, this passage described the Christ who was to come and deliver Israel. Here's what it says: "Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy." Did you catch that? Healing a blind man would have rung all sorts of bells for the disciples. I mentioned earlier that there was only one other place in Mark that Jesus uses spittle in a miracle. In Mark 7, only the previous chapter, he heals a man who is, get this, deaf and a mute, by sticking his fingers in his ears and spitting on his tongue. Again, strange and offensive. But, if you're a disciple of Jesus, hopefully you're starting to put two

and two together. The spittle stuff is weird, but here you've got Isaiah 35:5 coming to life! The eyes of the blind are opened! The ears of the deaf unstopped! The tongue of the mute singing for joy!

Except, that wasn't quite the case. In between these two stories of spittle healing, there's a conversation that Jesus has with his disciples. They're arguing about how much bread they have, and Jesus gets frustrated with them. He basically says, don't you get it? Let's look at exactly what he says. Starting in Mark 8:17, "And Jesus, aware of this, said to them, "Why are you discussing the fact that you have no bread? Do you not yet perceive or understand? Are your hearts hardened? Having eyes do you not see, and having ears do you not hear?" In other words, are you guys BLIND!?!?! Can't you see... me? Can't you hear... me? Isn't it interesting that he is asking this question, right after he heals the deaf man and right before he heals the blind man.

But there are more clues to gather here, because we still have to make sense of the spittle and of the way he heals in two stages. If you've got your Bible's open, can you see what the next story is after

the healing of the blind man? Immediately, the next story is about Peter confessing that Jesus is the Christ. He sees! He sees that Jesus is the Messiah, the one spoken about in Isaiah 35:5, the healer of the blind and deaf and mute. This is great!

But does he really see? Because what is the next story? Jesus says, all right, you got it, I'm the Christ, but I'm going to have to die and be raised back to life. And what does Peter do? He rebukes him, the big dummy. He sees, but he doesn't see clearly does he? Peter sees Jesus like the blind man sees people walking around like trees. His understanding only goes so far, and while he can see that Jesus is the Messiah, he doesn't get what that means.

And what does it mean? Right after Jesus rebukes Peter, he turns around to the crowds and tells them what it means to follow the Messiah: "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." This, is the spit in the eye. This is the offense that anyone must go through to see Jesus, who he really is clearly. You see, the disciples, including Jesus, had some idea that being Jesus' compadres meant that when things went down and Jesus ended up King of Israel, that meant riches and glory for the disciples. But Jesus is telling them the opposite, that the way to see and hear Jesus, the way to full healing, full restoration is not through comfort, not through power, it's the way of the cross. It's through offense, through weakness, through repentance, through humility, through self-denial and sacrifice.

Do you see it now? Do you see what the story of the blind man means? Jesus was showing his disciples something about himself when he did this. He was showing them that they could only see so much, and that if they wanted to truly see and hear Jesus, they would have to go through a process. Truly discovering Jesus would mean being led out of their comfort zone,

like the blind man was led out of the village. it would mean wrestling with the offensive notion that the Messiah would suffer, like the spit in the blind man's eyes. And it would mean that their healing was a process... that they might see the vague shape of who Jesus was, but in his timing they would see more and more who their Messiah really was.

Healing is a process... why? Because Healing is a process... that leads us to see Jesus. I love that we see this in both Marcio's story and Shannon's story. Their healings were not easy. It involved humbling themselves. It involved self-denial. It involved becoming very, very, uncomfortable. But it was precisely because their healing was slow, because it came in stages, that now Marcio and Shannon see Jesus in a way they never did before. Jesus still heals like this, and he does it intentionally, so that we can truly see him.

There are many people who receive healing, even today, instantaneously. Praise God for that. But there are many who do not. There are some of us, like Shannon and Marcio, who go through a process of healing. Maybe you're one of those people. Maybe you're waiting. Maybe you're only seeing dribs and drabs of healing, but not completely. Can I encourage you that Jesus has a plan? Could I encourage you that Jesus may be spitting in your eyes, so to speak? In the waiting, in the process of healing, don't be surprised that you experience the way of the cross. Don't be surprised that you go through humility, sacrifice, self-denial and pain on the way to healing. At the end of it all, this process of healing is something that he could be using to help you see Jesus like never before.

We are going to be taking communion tonight/today. When the early Christians first began to follow Jesus' instructions to remember him through the wine and the bread, their surrounding neighbors found it offensive. They were even accused of being cannibals! Why would you eat his flesh and blood? This was like the spit-in-the-eyes for those people. I find this so appropriate. The offense of Christ death, his humiliation, his pain, means for us our healing, our comfort. As we take of Christ's flesh and blood represented by the bread and the juice, we are reminded that we join him in that redemptive process. As his suffering became joy and wholeness, so too does ours.