

An Old man attended a faith healing session. The preacher said, "Stand up and walk!" The old man proceeded to stand up from his wheelchair and slowly walked. The shocked crowd yelled in praise. The preacher asked him: "How are you feeling now?" The old man replied: "Ok but I still can't see."

Our readings this morning talk about the sick being healed both in ancient Israel and in the time of Jesus. The same term for blind is used in the gospel as in Isaiah, which may be why the developers of the lectionary paired them this week. In Jesus healing the deaf man we see the fruition of this prophecy. And in the healing of the woman's daughter we see Jesus' ministry fulfilling the prophecy found elsewhere in Isaiah that Israel will be a light to enlighten the nations. In other words. Jesus isn't just healing people, he is healing society.

For example, we don't really know what's going on with Jesus' treatment of the deaf man. It's quite visceral using spit and touch, the ears and the mouth. We also have to note that such people were considered sinners in Jesus' society and were shunned, so it stands in stark contrast that Jesus deals with him very personally. As people who believe the grace of God is conveyed in sacraments, the physicality of God's presence should not be news to us. We may have difficulty understanding the details of this story but what is obvious is that God meets us as we are: real, physical human beings, with a body just as much as a soul. In other words, God encounters us. We see this in the person of Jesus Christ.

In times of trouble this can be quite comforting. You may have asked Jesus to walk with you in a difficult time. *I want Jesus to walk with me* is a wonderful hymn we can sing in times of difficulty. But it's even more than that. Jesus doesn't only heal me and you, Jesus heals the world. Jesus frees the world from the shackles of our sin. Take the episode with the Syro-Phoenecian woman. It's told elsewhere with different details but the essentials are the same. There is a woman. She is from another culture and she encounters him while Jesus is traveling on the borderlands where many people intermingle. She is not a Jew. Theories abound when people wonder why there is the exchange about feeding the dogs. Some like to say Jesus is being human, and a jerk like the rest of us; some say he is testing her and she passes. When you meet Jesus, you ask him and let me know. For now, let's try to get something worthwhile from the passage. And what we see in the details of the story are walls being broken down: a woman is listened to and in this action, all of humankind is brought into the Messiah's saving embrace. Gender, culture, and language are no longer barriers and people who would have been disinvited to the table are now the guests of honor. This light is enlightening all nations.

Doesn't that sound wonderful? To some, maybe. But even today, most of us like life the way it is and react very strongly when something tries to change it around. They killed Jesus to silence him and we need to wonder if we also tell Jesus to be quiet. Or who knows, we may face God's terrible recompense. What does God's terrible recompense look like? In our Isaiah passage today, we have wonderful images of the blind seeing, next to a line about God's vengeance. In its original context it may well have meant a real wish for God to strike down Israel's foes and free them from oppression and then there would be this utopian life for Israel in the promised land. But as Christians who believe the messiah is more than a military conqueror we would

better understand it to mean that to some, justice will look like God's wrath. Brian Simms has been a state representative in Philadelphia since 2012 and he is known for being the first openly gay representative from there. He has famously quoted: when you're accustomed to privilege equality feels like oppression. Billy Jean King has made the same statement on Instagram so it must be true. What kind of privilege do we have and how does it impact others?

We can go on answering that question. If we did an honest search, we can be at it for a while. It is a good question to ask and I invite us all to prayerfully ponder it today and whenever we may have a moment for prayerful introspection. It's worth asking because it gets to the heart of our readings and I would dare say the gospel message itself about justice, which often requires us to change. We are typically pretty good with charity but not so much with justice. What do I mean? In its modern sense, charity is giving of oneself to benefit another. If I have money I give it to someone who doesn't, for example. Churches take collections, run soup kitchens, have food pantries, give out diapers, and so much more. These charitable works are essential. But think of it like going to the doctor. Say I walk in with a headache. I may just want a pill and be on my way. But a good doctor will give me a thorough check up and probably run some tests. It may be a nuisance because I may have to take time out of my life to get an MRI or get blood drawn. It could be a bit painful or inconvenient and probably somewhat costly. I prefer not.

But I had symptoms and knew something was wrong. As inconvenient as it may be, the doctor wants us to know the real problem so we can root it out and truly be healed. If not, it won't go away and could lead to my demise. Once again: it may not go away and could lead to my demise. Charity is taking a pill for the headache. It doesn't make it really go away and the headache is leading to our demise. Justice is doing a thorough evaluation of the symptoms and getting to the root of the problem so there is true healing. Jesus is a savior who saves by making contact with all of God's children in such a way that overturns the structures we have created in order to return us to the Kingdom of God. This is justice.

James is trying to restore justice in his church as he writes about the wealthy getting preference while poor are being ignored. Why doesn't he just say to the rich: be sure to give to the poor in the church? Because James understands justice. The way we operate has to be overturned so there is no more separation; so your problems are my problems, so the way the world operates is in conformity with the Kingdom of God. There can be no partiality, there must be justice.

You may be familiar with the quote we have from Augustine's Confessions: *Lord make me pure, but not yet*. It invites a chuckle because we are all smart enough to know what it might really entail if we truly gave ourselves over to this way of life. What if we did ask Jesus to walk with us all the time, every day - really? I imagine decisions in board rooms might be different. I imagine the way we thought of and handled money might be different. I imagine the way we write laws might be different. I imagine that sometimes he would give me a pat on the back and other times a hug, and sometimes a smack upside the head. It sounds a bit tricky. But that's the idea. Jesus is always walking with me, and you, and him, and her, and them, and us, everywhere, all the time. Justice is living like Jesus is walking everywhere, all the time, with everyone. Which he is.