

“Personal Touch Ministry”

Back in July I was in a minor car accident that required body repair work to be done on my van. Each day that my van was in the repair shop I got a text message updating me on how the repair work was going. When I picked up my van, 5 days earlier than estimated, the staff at the repair shop was super friendly, helpful, and appreciative of my business. The day after I got my van home I received an email checking to make sure I was satisfied with the repairs and again thanking me for my business. A few days after I got my van home I received a handwritten thank you note in the mail from the repair shop thanking me again for my business and assuring me that the repairs are fully guaranteed should I have any future problems with the fixed parts on my van. I hope I never again need to get body work done on one of my vehicles, but if I do I know where I’m going to take my vehicle. The personal touch of Crash Champions left a positive impression on me. As I consider the events from the ministry of Jesus its striking how they all have something in common – everything is marked by the personal touch of Jesus. Let’s consider one of Jesus personal touch ministry miracles today. Mark 7:31-37.

³¹ Then Jesus left the vicinity of Tyre and went through Sidon, down to the Sea of Galilee and into the region of the Decapolis.^[a] ³² There some people brought to him a man who was deaf and could hardly talk, and they begged Jesus to place his hand on him.

³³ After he took him aside, away from the crowd, Jesus put his fingers into the man’s ears. Then he spit and touched the man’s tongue. ³⁴ He looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him, “Ephphatha!” (which means “Be opened!”). ³⁵ At this, the man’s ears were opened, his tongue was loosened and he began to speak plainly.

³⁶ Jesus commanded them not to tell anyone. But the more he did so, the more they kept talking about it. ³⁷ People were overwhelmed with amazement. “He has done everything well,” they said. “He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak.”

Jesus, creator of galaxies, could have healed this man long distance from his home in Capernaum. Instead, Jesus healed him in person walking roughly 50 miles from Tyre to the Decapolis, a two-day walk at the very least. Jesus, creator of the planets, could have just snapped his fingers and the man would have been healed. Instead, Jesus healed the man using the personal touch of putting his fingers in his ears and touching his tongue. Jesus, creator of stars that are bigger than the earth, could have just looked at the man and he would have been healed. Instead, Jesus sighed deeply and said “Be opened” in order to allow this man to enjoy hearing the sounds of the world and to allow this man the pleasure of communicating with others. Why would Scripture share these details with us? One reason might be to help the majority of us, who so often take for granted the ability to hear and speak, to take the time to appreciate these gifts from God. Another reason is that God wants us to be sensitive to the needs of those who have special needs. In fact, our synod (WELS) has a division called “Special Ministries” which seeks to provide help and resources to people like us as we try to help people who have special needs, like the man in our sermon lesson. Once a month I have the privilege of leading a Bible Study and spending time with four special needs individuals who live in a group home here in Newburg. Spending time with them brings me much joy and its one of the highlights of my month! If you have some special need, or have a family member or friend who has a special need, that effects

your/their ability to understand worship and Bible Study here at St. John's, please don't suffer in silence. Speak to one of your pastors and we will see what our congregation can do to help.

The personal touch of Jesus on display in our sermon lesson is intended to do more than help those without special needs be more appreciative of what they have and encouraging awareness and action to help those with special needs. The personal touch of Jesus on display is primarily about building relationships and saving souls. Less than 1% of the world's population falls into the category of being deaf and mute. 5% of the world's population suffers from disabling hearing loss. 100% of people are conceived and born spiritually deaf and spiritually mute. Spiritually not wanting to hear the message of the Bible and its good news about our Savior, Jesus Christ. Spiritually not wanting to speak and being unable to speak to others about Jesus as Savior. Spiritual deafness and muteness is a much greater problem than physical deafness and muteness because while the physical problem is contained to this earth – the spiritual problem will last into eternity. We need Jesus personal touch to fix our spiritual problems. That is the type of Savior Scripture tells us we have. **“For we do not have a... (Savior) who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet was without sin (Hebrews 4:15). Since the children have flesh and blood, he (Jesus) too shared their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death – that is the devil – and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death” (Heb. 2:14-15).** We have experienced the personal touch of Jesus in our lives. Even if Jesus hasn't cured you of every physical ailment – he has personally taken care of your spiritual problems. Jesus didn't save you in some remote heavenly studio, where he was in control of all the conditions. No, Jesus got personal with us and came to this earth; became a human being; and dealt with all the factors of being human. Jesus perfectly handled every temptation to close his ears to those who asked for his help and to misuse his tongue by speaking unloving words that were meant to hurt others. Jesus pushed aside those who wanted him to focus on an earthly kingdom and the glory that went with it so that he could focus on an eternal kingdom that meant suffering Hell and death for him, but spiritual healing and eternal pleasure for you. Jesus personal touch didn't end there. Through the waters of baptism Jesus personally allowed you to see and feel how he took the cleaning rag of the cross and washed away your sins. Through his Holy Word Jesus personally opened your heart and mind to believe that you have nothing to fear about death and eternity for you are an heir of eternal life in Heaven. Through Holy Communion Jesus personally allows you, the repentant sinner, to see, touch, and taste in a personal way the continuous flow of his love and forgiveness. You have been touched by the personal touch ministry of Jesus. And you continue to be touched by the personal touch ministry of Jesus every time you make use of Word and Sacrament and every time God uses someone in your life to care for your physical and spiritual needs.

I wonder what happened to the man Jesus healed that day. Did he say, “gee thanks, Jesus, see you later” and the rest of his life was spent indulging sin, unbelief, and selfishness? The Bible doesn't tell us, but somehow I doubt that's how it played out. This wasn't the first time that Jesus had been to the Decapolis region. In Mark 5 we are told of how Jesus came to this region and healed a man who had been possessed by many evil spirits. The man was so appreciative of what Jesus did that he wanted to become a pastor. Jesus told him that wasn't the plan for his life, but he did tell him what the plan was. **“Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you. So the man went away and began to tell in the Decapolis how much Jesus had**

done for him. And all the people were amazed” (Mark 5:19-20). It’s possible that the witness of this formally demon possessed man, who experienced the personal touch ministry of Jesus in his life, led to the events of our sermon lesson for today. How do we respond to Jesus personal touch ministry in our own lives? If we are honest, each of us would have to admit that there are plenty of times that we lean more to the side of “gee thanks, Jesus, see you later” and we focus on our own selfish earthly pursuits and desires and are less concerned about the needs of others. Experience again the personal touch ministry of Jesus: “as God’s servant and representative and by his authority I forgive you of your selfish worldliness. Now go and leave your life of selfish worldliness.” Forgiven in Christ God wants each of us to remember that while he has not called each of us into the public pastor or teacher ministry, he has called each of us into the universal priesthood ministry of all believers. Ministry simply means service. Jesus has called you and continues to call you to embrace a personal touch ministry. What does that look like? It’s the way you act toward and speak to your children, parents, siblings, other family, friends, co-workers, classmates, teammates, neighbors, authority figures and even strangers. It’s a smile with some kind and encouraging words. It’s showing respect and having a good work ethic. It’s being aware of others who need some help and being willing to help, without even being asked. It’s noticing the person in the group that seems left out and doing your best to talk to them and make them feel included. It’s taking a genuine interest in other people’s lives and spending time with them – rejoicing with them in times of rejoicing and mourning with them in times of mourning. It’s being thankful and showing appreciation for what others do for you. It’s speaking the truth, but doing it in a loving and respectful way. It’s fighting the urge to spend my money and time only on me, but looking for opportunities (among family, friends, community, church, synod) to help others. And countless other personal touch ministry opportunities that the Lord has already prepared in advance for you to consider.

“Jesus commanded them not to tell anyone. But the more he did so, the more they kept talking about it. People were overwhelmed with amazement. ‘He has done everything well,’ they said. ‘He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak” (Mark 7:36-37). Jesus didn’t talk about his personal touch ministry. He just lived it and people’s earthly and eternal lives were impacted positively because of him. Christians, positively impacted by the personal touch ministry of Jesus, go and do the same. Do it not for your own personal earthly gain. Instead think of the positive impact you can have on the lives of others for being this way. If Crash Champions personal touch can lead me to look forward to needing car repairs again, imagine what might happen if Christians like us showed more personal touch in our lives? Imagine the opportunities to share the Gospel that might come our way? Imagine the eternal relationships that might be formed? Just imagine...Amen.