

One of the interesting features of today's Gospel story is how it is one of only three stories that are found in Mark's Gospel alone. It was clearly an encounter with Jesus that was of some importance to him and to his Church community. He has located it just after the story of the healing of the daughter of the Syrophenician woman, a miracle in which Jesus highlights the way his mission is for all men and women regardless of nationality, gender or beliefs. This also helps explain why he is here in Gentile territory and not back among the children of Israel.

For Mark, Jesus' healing ministry is paramount

Mark understands how the Father sent His Son so that all men and women may have an opportunity for healing. This "healing" is what happens for all who find themselves living under divine rule. For the author, this continuous portrayal of Jesus as a healer demonstrates the Kingdom of God unfolding in the here and now. The closer we live in Jesus, the more His healing graces make their way into our own lives and through us, into the wider world. Thus, the image painted for us by Mark is of Jesus turning up in the most unlikely of places (among Gentiles) responding to the needs of the community. Those who do not yet know Christ as the One sent by God are able to hear God speaking to them. This Jesus is actively participating in the world around us. This Jesus engages with those who need healing – of any and all kinds.

Another key feature of Mark's Gospel is the use he makes of the word *immediately*. Mark uses the term forty-one times! That represents seventy percent of its usage across the whole of the New Testament. This Gospel comes with its own built-in sense of urgency. What he is proclaiming over and over again is how the world needs Christ now more than ever – whatever the age in which it is proclaimed. Even when they are unable to articulate this need in Gospel terms. The longer the world waits to hear and experience that divine healing, the greater the pain and anguish. This is why the miracle takes place over just a few short verses.

The deaf man is brought before Jesus and he is healed. It is as simple as that. Such is the authority and power in His ministry. He exudes healing. One only has to engage with the Lord Christ and life is transformed – healed. This helps explain why his mission unfolds amongst the poor, weak and vulnerable. Of all people, they are the ones who understand their need for something more than the world can offer, something more than they can achieve through their own efforts.

Jesus ventures into the dark territories

Mark has Jesus positioned in Gentile territory. Why is this important? Because, for a Jewish male this would have been at odds with the religious culture and expectations of the day. Jews did not mingle with Gentiles. The "clean" did not associate with those who were "unclean". Jesus has already come into conflict with the religious demands as expressed by the Pharisees and lawyers. For them, Judaism survived on its laws and traditions. To break them was to place the whole of their religious system under threat and bring uncertainty into their lives with God. Jesus had come to offer the only reliable way to God, and so to healing and life – acceptance of Him as God's Son.

Inclusion and openness are foundational for today's story as it is for the entire Gospel of Mark. No one, saint or sinner, is beyond the healing love of God.

When these people bring the deaf man to Jesus, they are bringing him for a laying on of hands, for a blessing, something that had long been a part of Jewish traditions. But what a surprise they had! Jesus did not simply lay His healing hands on this man. In a most intimate manner, Jesus touched the man and anointed him with His own spittle. The exact meaning behind these actions remain hidden, but what is clear is how this was a typical engagement with Jesus – one on one. The needy meeting with the Healer. He was desperate. They were desperate and it is not hard to imagine how many times they had longed for this moment. How many failed attempts they had already experienced at the hands of medical men. Now we are shown Jesus in action. It is as if he has rolled up his sleeves and gone into battle against this deafness. But it was no real battle. Mark simply shows Jesus in an intimate engagement with his deafness and the deafness is cured.

In this case, the man received a whole lot more than this. His encounter with Jesus led to complete healing and a renewal of life as his hearing and speech were restored through touch and spittle. Mark captures a moment of love seeking intimacy in the world where this man and Jesus share in the same reality. In acknowledging the source of his love, Mark turns Jesus' eyes to heaven as he does also in Mk 6:41. This is of supreme importance to Mark's **Gospel** as it points to the fruits of prophetic fulfillment as outlined in **Jewish** prophecy.

The text contains a clear allusion to [Isaiah 35:5](#) which predicts the coming era when *'the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped and the tongue of the dumb shout for joy.'* This man's healing was a profound outpouring of Jesus' humanity and divinity. This would have opened up this individual's whole world as he could now participate in society again and celebrate his human dignity through community.

Interestingly, Jesus takes the man away from the crowd to perform what is one of the most graphically beautiful healings across all four Gospels. He plunges his fingers into his ears and uses spittle as a healing balm for the man's wounded tongue. Such healing techniques were common in the ancient world. Jesus would have been most familiar with them. Jesus is also portrayed as giving a command for the individual's ears to be opened. This aspect of the text also demonstrates Jesus' desire to ignore social and religious boundaries that diminished the demonstration of God's love for all. From the perspective of **Jewish** Law, Jesus' actions would have placed him right in the middle of an 'unclean' situation'. This was clearly a block to achieving his missionary endeavors.

The text concludes with a unique command for silence in Mark's **Gospel** and a confession of faith. The crowd is left astonished and wellness results from this encounter with Jesus. This alludes to the original sense of everything being well as outlined in the first creation story ([Gen 1: 31](#)). All three of these textual attributes are found in several **Gospel** healing stories.

Ideas/phrases/concepts:

Healing and Wellness

Healing is key to Jesus' ministry across all four Gospels. Every healing, including the one in focus, is a demonstration of God's love and compassion present in the here and now. Healing and healers were common in the ancient world. Jesus is often asked where he gets his authority from and amazement often accompanies his healing encounters. What sets Jesus apart from other healers was

his relationship with God. His entire mission emerged from this relationship and all healing reflected God's love for all of creation. Blessing abounded in a complex world of division, judgement and law.

Restoration and Inclusion

Another core theme emerging from this text is that of restoration and inclusion. One is not only healed physically but is offered the chance for life again – in fullness. In a world which cast out those who were ill, healing restores people to their community groups, relationships, and social worlds. Jesus battled against those who would not accept this radical interpretation of Jewish Law, wherein love and compassion appears as the new foundation for right relationships. An essential offshoot of his ministry was the experience of inclusion. There were no boundaries in Jesus' world as he set about reimagining human dignity and compassion for all. Jesus' actions, such as that demonstrated in this text, caused growing anxiety and tension between Jesus and the authorities who found it very difficult to cope with the following he received.