

[The reading for the sermon was Mark 7:31-37; it was not read]

Thank you for welcoming me here. My name's Lola brown. I'm an ecumenical minister. I'm now working in a Methodist church and ministering there in North London, but most of my ministry, and community ministry, is in South East London between East Dulwich and Catford. I've known your pastor, Steve, for many years now and we've been friends, and our paths have crossed many times in ministry, and so I'm glad to be sharing in ministry here today with you. He did give me some instructions and I understand you're doing a series on Walking with Jesus, and my portion today is really: Jesus and Healing. I was wondering, actually, with the scripture (and that's Mark 7:31-37), and I was thinking to my self: "What do I say? Yes, Jesus heals. We know that he heals. There's lots of controversy around healing. What is it that I should bring to you today?" And I think that most people before they speak aren't arrogant enough to say: "Well, I'm just going to go there and I'm going to speak!" It's an honour to be really bringing the Word of God, and it's an honour to be speaking before God's people.

So I've got a perspective today which I'd like to share with you, and it's this (I've take the last clause of the section that Steve gave me, and it finishes on): "He has done all things well" – that's what the people said about Jesus after the did the healing: "He has done all things well!" And that's an important phrase because prior to that they were wanting to string him up. There was controversy about him healing on the Sabbath Day, whether he should be dong anything on the Sabbath Day; there was criticism about being called the Son of God – they were always criticising him, but yet, in this chapter, the people concede that Jesus has done all things well. One of the things is that love is always at the heart of all of Christ's actions. God so loved the world that he sent his only begotten son to love us, basically, so that we could, likewise, indulge in this kind of love. John 3:16 articulates this, and Revelation 1:5. But it doesn't tell the full story: on the cross Christ initiated a love to break us from a loveless curse, from our life of lovelessness, from our life of sin, and he gifted us with new hearts to make us love givers to promote healing in the world, to promote reconciliation in the world, to promote restoration in the world. God did this so that we could become whole human beings, and so we could promote wholeness like him, and even in our broken states, and even in a state of lawlessness he bestowed upon us his grace so that we could be repaired and restored.

The man in the story in Mark chapter 7, and if you know the story – for time I'm not going to go into it, but basically in summary there was a man who was deaf and he was mute, and some friends brought him to Jesus, and they thought that if Jesus could only touch him then he would be made whole. When I think about this man he was in a state of adverse dependency (I don't know if anybody has even been like that – I've worked with people who were substance dependent, I, myself, have sometimes had a battle with food and I'm sure it shows on me). But he had an adverse dependency and he was at the mercy of others to help him; he couldn't do anything for himself: he couldn't hear, he had no voice to speak, he couldn't articulate his needs, he couldn't reference his needs; and so he was in a state of adverse dependency. He was possibly in a state of turmoil and confusion. When you can't help yourself you're left feeling with low self esteem. Those of us who have been neglected, those of us who have often been excluded from various things will know that it has an effect on your self esteem and you have to claw your way back to a reality that you can exist, and that you can live, and you have to regain your confidence. He was

probably in a state of poverty so he had to beg for a living – imagine the humiliation of that, having to beg for your existence, asking in that manner. What that must do to you! He had no position; sometimes we're in a place where we don't have a position. He had no position, he was seen as vulnerable, he was possibly seen as the underdog. Even if he had some skills, were they even recognised? But there were a few that thought if only he had one encounter with Jesus, one touch with Jesus, it would be transforming. So the people who brought this man to Jesus were acting as intercessors. We've just prayed for the world, we've just prayed for different people; we've prayed for the sick. When we do that we are acting as intercessors, we are praying on behalf of others with compassion and being conduits of the love of God, being conduits of his healing power, of his grace and his mercy. The people who brought the deaf and mute man to Jesus knew that Jesus was a man of distinction – he led a life of distinction – and so when he healed the man they said; “He has done all things well.” I hope you don't mind if I say a few “Hallelujahs!”

A definition that I've come across of “whole” means “containing all components, complete, not divided or disjoint, nor wounded, injured or impaired, sound or unharmed.” A further biblical definition of “wholeness” is offered by the Faith and Health Connection, and they say “it's a state of being perfectly well in body, soul, mind, will and emotions.” When Jesus heals it touches your entire parts; through Jesus we are made whole: the wholeness of Jesus has given us access to the throne room of grace. When God heals us he remodels us, he recreates us, he lets us know without question that we are accepted in the universal church of God. We're accepted in his family, and we can come as we are – we can come broken as we are – because he accepts us, brings us into his fold and heals us, and makes us whole. Hallelujah! I thank God for his wholeness and his healing and his deliverance. I'm passionate about what God has done because I know what he has done for me: if it wasn't for him, I wouldn't be standing here in front of you today, because he's brought me back, as the Gospel Singers will say, He's brought me back from a mighty long way, he's took my brokenness, he took the broken Lola, he took the unsound Lola, put her back together, and now I can speak his word, and speak of joy untold; Hallelujah!

There is a need for us to advocate on behalf of those we are concerned about; just as the friend brought the deaf and the mute man to Jesus we need to advocate for those who are in need of support and help. We need to advocate for those who have no voice. We need to advocate for those who have lost their voices. We need to advocate who cannot speak for themselves. We need to advocate for those who have not been able to develop the language to articulate what they need to say. We need to advocate on behalf of those people.

When Jesus touched the man it was an individual touch, it was a unique touch; it was a touch that was tailor made for him. When Jesus touches anyone of us it's a touch that is unique to our needs, and we become whole as a result of the encounter that we have with Jesus. The touch of Jesus had healing properties. This encounter depicts the supremacy of Jesus; and that Jesus is the expressed image of the father. The first born over all creation; for him in all things created in heaven and earth, visible and invisible; whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities, all things have been created through Jesus. And so Jesus has an awesome portfolio, which redeems us and renews our confidence in God. Colossians 2:10 says this: “and you are complete in him who is head of all principality and power.” The wholeness of the son gives you a reality that is not flawed with distortion but rather it's a redeeming quality, reminding us that we are all God's children and we are created in his image. Amen!

Finally I want to say that Jesus' touch is transformational: he translates us from a life of darkness

into a life of light. How important it is, especially in this trying times, for us to see the light of Jesus at the end of this tunnel. Jesus heals, he restores, he reconciles, he rebuilds, he reforms, but most of all he does all things well.

I'm glad to be here with you today; I hope it will be the first of many other visits and we'll see how I did, whether I get an invitation back...I'm just joking - we're all doing God's work; but keep up the good work, keep up the work at this end. Keep doing what you're doing for Christ and remember that the Lord has your back; he heals, he makes you whole, and he does all things well. Just want to finish off with a short prayer.

Father God we just thank you for Woodside Baptist Church. We thank you Lord that you've called each and everyone to be whole in you. We thank you, Lord, that you're taking Woodside through a new phase; the pathway you have set out for them, Lord, will become clearer and the vision will become even clearer. We thank you for the work they've already completed, and we thank you, Lord, for clarity on what they're going to go onto. And so we ask Lord that you uphold them, keep them in your vision Lord, embrace them Lord, help them to continually hear your voice and cat on your word. And help this church, Lord, that having done all they will continue to stand in faith. We ask that in Jesus' name, amen.