On the Mend

***Then looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, “Ephphatha,” that is, “Be opened.” And immediately his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. — Mark 7: 34-35***

**Are you sick and tired of being sick and tired? Are you ready to be “on the mend?” In this Fall series we will uncover the wounds that hold us back from the fullness of life. The lectionary readings for this Fall (Year B) offer many stories of Jesus healing and speaking about what brings wholeness (the “Reign of God”). Join us as we move out of old ways of being into new possibilities!**

**Week One — Healing Intentions**

*So the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, “Why do your disciples not live according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands? . . . You abandon the commandment of God and hold to human tradition.” Then he called the crowd again and said to them, “Listen to me, all of you, and understand: there is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile, but the things that come out are what defile. For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come. . .” — Mark 7: 1-8; 14-15; 21-23*

Hurting others or being hurt by others seems an inevitable part of life. Our “good intentions” for our lives and relationships can so easily go awry when faced with our own inner pain. In our scripture today, those concerned with “the law” (the correct way to do things) are admonished by Jesus. The only way to be undefiled, Jesus says, is to know wholeness on the inside, not just focus on appearing “pure” on the outside. For when we are healed from the inside-out, our intentions are love.

**Week Two — Healing Inhibitions**

*They brought to him a deaf man who had an impediment in his speech; and they begged him to lay his hand on him. He took him aside in private, away from the crowd, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spat and touched his tongue. Then looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, “Ephphatha,” that is,” Be opened.” And immediately his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. — Mark 7: 24-37*

People were “astounded,” says the scripture, that Jesus could restore hearing and speech. As we explore the ways in which we need to be healed, this Sunday we consider the things we are closed off to and the things about which we stay silent. Shutting things out or holding things in can both be dangerous to our health. Healing can mean the freedom to face difficult things. Jesus says to us, “be opened!”

**Week Three — Healing Fear**

*He called the crowd with his disciples and said to them, “If any want to be come my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life?” — Mark 8: 27-38*

Jesus begins to speak about his death to the disciples and it stirs up such fear in Peter that he chews Jesus out! Jesus returns the favor and tries to give his followers another perspective: Sure, it is risky to live the Gospel-way, but what is the risk of NOT doing this? Death of another kind…living in fear. How do we heal our fear of losing the things of this world so that we can truly live?

**Week Four — Healing Pride**

*Then they came to Capernaum; and when he was in the house he asked them, “What were you arguing about on the way?” But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another who was the greatest. He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, “Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.” — Mark 9: 30-37*

Our North American culture tends to honor the competitive spirit. But naming “the greatest” is not just a recent obsession — seems it was a popular conversation among Jesus’ disciples too. But the pride of being number one can come at the cost of trampling others. Jesus turns the definition of being “first” upside-down: it is by serving others that we are lifted up and made whole. What relief and healing could come by letting go of the need to be right, to be first or to “win?”

**Week Five — Healing Divisions**

*John said to him, “Teacher, we say someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us.” But Jesus said, “Do not stop him; for no one who does a deed of power in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me. Whoever is not against us is for us. For truly I tell you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ will by no means lose the reward. If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea.” — Mark 9: 38-50*

“Like me/not like me” can be an attitude that invades and deteriorates our health. In the scripture this Sunday, Jesus’ disciples are concerned about who is part of the “in crowd” and who isn’t. Who is sanctioned or not? And Jesus says, “Come on! Whoever is not against us is for us!” And then he goes on (in a very dramatic way) of making a point that the worst thing you can do is be a stumbling block to someone else…even and especially if they are not up to your standards! Are we creating healing wholeness or division?

**Week Six — Healing Trust**

*People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, “Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.” And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them. — Mark 10: 13-16*

Jesus is clear that children hold the keys to the kingdom. He repeatedly invites people to become more like children in order to receive the world as God intends. What is it about children that we are to seek in order to reside in the healing wholeness of God? It may be in the way the children come to him, are willing to be taken up in his arms, trusting him for blessing and not ill. What in our lives has damaged the trusting child within us that keeps us back, keeps us scared and skeptical of the goodness of God?

**Week Seven — Healing Hold-Outs**

*As he was setting out on a journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” . . . [Jesus said,] “You know the commandments: ‘You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; You shall not defraud; Honor your father and mother.” He said to him, “Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth.” Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, “You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.” When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions. — Mark 10: 17-31*

What is your “hold-out”? The rich man could agree to all kinds of things to “get in good” with God, but in the end, he loved his possessions more than anything. The scripture says that Jesus looked at him and loved him. He saw into the rich man’s heart and could see what was holding him back from true living in the reign of God. A healing wholeness comes with knowing that whatever we hold dear is what will, in the end, hold us.

**Week Eight — Healing Power**

*James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward to him and said to him, “Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.” And he said to them, “What is it you want me to do for you?” And they said to him, “Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory…” So Jesus called [the disciples] and said to them, “You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all.” — Mark 10: 35-45*

Who gets to be the most important? Yes, we’ve seen this question from the disciples come up already in this worship series. But perhaps, just like the disciples, this is something we need to hear again: To follow Jesus is to find power in the opposite of what most “rulers” say makes you important. To be a tyrant is to claim a false power based on deep fear. To claim a healing power is to find strength in humility.

**Week Nine — Healing Vision**

*They came to Jericho. As he and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout and say, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” . . . Then Jesus said to him, “What do you want me to do for you?” The blind man said to him, “My teacher, let me see again.” Jesus said to him, “Go; your faith has made you well.” Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way. — Mark 10: 46-52*

We come to the last week of our series on healing. Like the people in the scripture stories we have encountered, we have heard Jesus point the way toward a more whole and rewarding way of living when we confront the wounds within. We are “on the mend!” This last story of healing offers the idea that when we ask Jesus for in-sight, we can expect results. What insights have we gained in this journey of healing?