

Grace, mercy and peace unto you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the sermon is taken from the Gospel reading.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, it really is a privilege for me to be with you this Sunday, at Our Savior Westminster. As many of you know, I am visiting your Church, among other congregations in the country, to create a network of individuals and partner Churches, to prayerfully walk alongside me in my call to Italy and to also prayerfully consider financially partnering with me and family with our work in that country.

And as a Pastor Missionary, through our Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, in preparation for my deployment to Italy, there are many, many meetings about life overseas. Educational sessions with topics like moving to a new country, emergency evacuation and health insurance. And one of the options, for health care, available to us as international workers and not only to us, but apparently is becoming available in all corners of the US, the world... is receiving medical care over skype, over the computer, over Facetime, over the internet.

No need to leave your home, no personal contact necessary, no touching.. You don't need to worry about germs or being exposed to any viruses, it can all be done, digitally, through the internet.

Now, on one side, it can be conceded that this idea has its advantages, especially living in a foreign country, being able to speak with an American doctor, who speaks English, or even being able to keep your doctor, when you move overseas, is really an amazing thing.

But, on the other side, it must also be conceded, that despite these advantages, that there is in society, in our culture, education an incredible movement away from tangible, real things, away from things you can touch... a frightening dynamic separating us from a real presence, an in the flesh relationship, an incarnational presence...toward an artificial presence, a digital presence that can hardly be called a presence at all.

Brothers and sisters, that's not what we see in our New Testament reading for this Sunday, that's not what Jesus is all about. Oh sure, there are all sorts of ways that God had, in the past communicated, had established a presence with his creation. The letter to the Hebrews reminds us of that. **In many and various ways, God spoke to his people of old by the prophets.**

To Moses, God communicated by means of a burning bush. To Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, God had sent many different messengers who should be considered manifestations of the preincarnate Son of God. After God rescued the Israelites from Egypt, he made his presence known by a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. During those 40 years he was there by his holy presence in the tabernacle, located in the holy of holies... but don't get too close or you will die.

There were all sorts of ways that God communicated to his people, by prophecy, vision and dreams. **In many and various ways, God spoke to his people of old by the prophets... but now in these last days, he has spoken to us by his Son.**

And in our text for this Sunday, we see God infinitely closer than he had ever been before. We see the power of the incarnation, of God taking on meat and flesh and bones. We see the Second Person of the Trinity getting personal with his creation, touching his creation. No social distancing here, no 6 feet of separation. Sticking his finger in the man's ear, even spitting on the guy's tongue. It doesn't get any more personal than that.

So, then, I suppose, it begs the question of whether or not God could have done it another way. Could God have stayed up in heaven and beamed down his divine presence from the clouds? Did God have to become man? Must the second person of the Trinity be born of Mary in a manger?

Does a father have to be with his son or daughter? Does a mother have to be with her child? Could you carry out your marriage over Skype or Facetime? Could a Pastor be a shepherd to his flock over the internet?

It's an interesting question and to answer it, I invite you to think back to the initial illustration. Could a doctor heal over the internet? Could a physician fix something simply over a ZOOM or Facetime call? Well, I suppose, it depends on the seriousness of the disease, the gravity of the problem. If it's simply prescribing some sort of antibiotic for a simple sinus infection... if it's simply filling out a subscription for some insulin or some minor health condition then sure, I could see how a doctor could practice medicine with his patients over the internet.

But for something more serious, for a true emergency, in a life and death situation, you would want, you would need the doctor there, with you in the room. Giving birth, having heart or spinal or brain surgery requires a physical presence of the surgeon, of the doctors, the nurses, the hospital personnel.

So whether or not it is necessary for the doctor to be present, depends on the seriousness of the problem of the disease... And in the same way, whether or not it is necessary for God to be present, depends on the seriousness of the problem of our sin.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, God needs to be present, he needs to be born, he needs to be incarnate. He needs to stick his finger in your ear and spit on your tongue. The seriousness of the disease of sin requires it. You aren't just a little sick with sin, you don't just have a cold or a minor infection... you don't just need to take a day off from work to sleep off a fever. You are dead in your sin. The condition of your disease is fatal. The sickness of your sin will kill you. You need immediate care, you need emergency care.

You need God present in your life. As sinners, we need the incarnation. We need a physical connection. Sure you might talk to your children over the internet from time to time, but you also need to be there, in person, to give them a hug and a kiss. Sure, on a business trip, you might, for a time, chat with your spouse over Facetime, but marriage demands the intimate, physical time together of a husband and a wife. And sure, right now, the Lutheran Church of Italy is almost entirely online, most of us connect together through the internet and weekly a Saturday ZOOM service, but that can't continue forever. And it is entirely necessary that I go to that country to be a Pastor, in the flesh, with blood and bones, to those people in that place.

It's essential that I be there, and it was essential for God to be there. The seriousness of sin requires it. The desperate nature of our condition demands it. Our salvation is so important to God, that by nothing less than the incarnation would God save you. Our salvation is so important to Him that he personally carries it out. God himself took on flesh, blood and bones to go to the cross, to have his flesh torn open, his blood poured out and his bones ripped out of joint. Could he have done it another way? He loves us so much that he had to do it this way.

And taking him aside from the crowd privately, he put his fingers into his ears, and after spitting touched his tongue. And looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, "Ephphatha," that is, "Be opened." And his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly.

This is how God acted then in our story and this is how God acts today in our lives. He comes to us with his body and his blood in the bread and the wine. He comes to us in the waters of Baptism. Yes, he speaks to us in his Word, but let's never think of the Word as something empty or hollow, in one ear out the other as an empty concept... Jesus sticks his fleshy, boney finger in this man's ear, in both ears.

Real things that you can see, hear, taste, touch and smell. God doesn't beam his presence from heaven, and our Savior doesn't project his forgiveness from the clouds. He chooses to be with us, personally, bodily, incarnationally for our salvation.

And they were astonished beyond measure, saying, "He has done all things well. He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak."

Before God's healing touch in our ear and his saving presence on our tongue, we were trapped in silent darkness. But now that our sins have been washed away, our ears have been healed by his word and our tongue loosened by his body and blood... our whole being is refocused to him. Now all of our senses, taste, smell, sight and touch, are refocused to him, to serve him.

It is true that now, we only see in part, we taste in part, we hear in part. We don't fully understand. But someday all the veils will be forever removed. Just like they were for this man, when Christ returns we will see things as they truly are, to forever hear, taste, smell and see the goodness of God, to forever proclaim the goodness of God, who truly **has done all things well**. In his name, amen.