

*Lord, open our ears to hear your Word spoken to us; Open our hearts to be changed by Your Spirit. Amen.*

I think it's fair to say most of us feel pretty helpless to do anything about climate change – how to go about healing water, land, skies, people. While we've been watching this slow train wreck, things have gotten pretty dire. I read this week that America's soil is so degraded and so much of it has been lost through appallingly stupid agricultural policies, such as growing only one crop and paying people to grow only one crop and never letting the land recover ... And paving over trees and meadows that actually keep the wind from having devastating effects on the soil, which ends up damming ponds and waterways. We have cut down 95 percent of all virgin forest, drained and filled 60 percent of our wetlands, degraded half of all native ecosystems to the point of endangerment.<sup>1</sup> Most waterways on the planet are now polluted and our oceans are choked with plastic bags and garbage, killing wildlife. We have lost hundreds of thousands if not millions of species, many organisms that none of us will ever see and so may think we don't miss, yet each of them a part of an ecosystem that supported other life that we need. A warming planet with melting ice caps has also created great opportunities for mosquitoes, which are now bearing potentially fatal viruses. It goes on... here's one I just heard about yesterday: all those photos on our phones and on our social media? They get stored. And storage requires bigger and bigger data centers, so we're losing even more soil and precious ground.

And we look at all this and go, "What could we possibly do? What could we even have done?" Well, people could've have done a lot of things that they didn't do. It seems impossible. But try this: What if we were confronted with somebody who had total hearing loss and in fact, had been born that way. Would we think we could restore their hearing? Restore site lost their sight? All of these things also are impossible, not only seem impossible – except along came of person for whom they were not impossible, who in fact told us that with God nothing is impossible.

Today we're going to talk about healing the earth and I think as I said last week, Christ followers have a great role to play cause we believe in healing.

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<sup>1</sup> *Biomimicry: Innovation Inspired by Nature*; Janine Benyus, 1997 Harper-Collins

We know something about conducting the power of God into this world. We can get some clues into how we might approach this impossible healing by looking at the story we heard this morning, when Jesus healed a Deaf man, and another time he healed a man born blind. Both were on the edges of the community, as people with disabilities, and the man we read about today lived in a Greek-speaking area. Maybe he was a Gentile.

Jesus takes this man aside, away from the crowd, and offers him healing in an intimate way, with his own saliva, touching his ears and mouth, speaking this word: “Ephphatha” Be Opened!”

He demonstrates God’s love in relationship. And the man is healed.

So there is a clue – we cannot wave a wand and heal the entire planet, all waters, all skies, all forests, all fields, all wildlife.

We have to draw near to one area, one issue, one wound at a time.

If we set out to use less water – don’t let it run while we brush our teeth; stop buying plastic water bottles and start using the reusable ones we all have at home – even at church (leave it in your car!) – we begin to heal waters.

If we stop putting pesticides on our lawns and plant flowers that pollinators like, we begin to heal our fields and even increase food production.

It’s personal, and specific – and needs to be a relationship. We need to spend time in the natural world, come to love it and its creatures, teach our children to.

But there is something else about this story, even more pronounced in the healing of the blind man: Jesus uses his own saliva, his own body, his self.

With the Deaf man, he spits and touches the man’s tongue – that saliva becomes a sacrament, a material thing used by God to effect a miracle.

With the Blind man, Jesus spits on the ground, makes a mud with the saliva and spreads that on the man’s eyes, and then sends him off to wash in a particular pool. He does so and comes back able to see. Jesus brings the earth into the healing – that becomes part of the sacramental material that effects a miracle.

So we, as we go about seeking to heal the damage done to our earth and its life, we can use the gifts creation offers, model our approaches on how nature does it.

The natural world already knows how to do so much of what we manufacture, engineer and strive to accomplish, if only we would listen, watch, observe, copy.

On my way home from Michigan this summer I listened to an interview with Janine Benyus, author of a 1997 book called “Biomimicry: Innovation Inspired By Nature.” Listening to her speak blew the top of my head off.

Biomimicry is a discipline devoted to observing how nature handles challenges:  
how a prairie knows how to grow things to enrich the soil, not deplete it;  
the sequence of organisms that come into a burned out field, bringing life back;  
how mangroves can desalinate water without damaging the environment;  
how trees and bees communicate so that their communities flourish.

The way the body can heal naturally without toxins.

Biomimicry is starting to be used in manufacturing, design, medicine, finance.  
It may have gifts for the church seeking to rebuild after decades of decline.

As we seek to bring healing to this “fragile earth, our island home,” we can quiet ourselves enough to watch, listen, learn and mimic the healing already among us. Healing is part of God’s very nature, and God put built it into us and our world.

*Say to those who are of a fearful heart, "Be strong, do not fear! Here is your God. Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy. For waters shall break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert; the burning sand shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water.*

No one expected to see those streams breaking forth in their lifetime.

And do we expect to see such things, breaking forth before us?

Yet God has started it it – from within the creation.

It was initiated from outside of us, in Jesus the Christ – yet even this Jesus was not air-dropped onto us from the skies. Even this Jesus came from inside a woman. The new thing that God is up to God is doing through the very human beings who turned away from God. God is doing this new thing through us, in all our frailty and sometimes cruelty and uncertain faith.

My friends, we are the healing stream in the desert!

We are to flow out to every dry and parched place and person, bringing life, bringing healing, opening ears to hear and the mouths to sing God’s praises.

As the Body of Christ we are united with him in baptism, Christ lives in us.

We don’t just follow his example – we carry his love and power with us. In us.

We go out seeking parched places and people and come into healing relationship, Powered by our relationship with God.

The vertical becomes the horizontal. The horizontal gives life to the vertical.

We live the cross. We get in touch with the living river of the Spirit, we carry it out. Every time we let the river flow through us, healing happens. *Amen.*

### **Mark 7:31-37**

Then he returned from the region of Tyre, and went by way of Sidon towards the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis. 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. Then Jesus ordered them to tell no one; but the more he ordered them, the more zealously they proclaimed it. They were astounded beyond measure, saying, "He has done everything well; he even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak."

### **Isaiah 7:1-7a**

The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose. It shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing: the glory of Lebanon shall be given unto it, the excellency of Carmel and Sharon, they shall see the glory of the Lord, and the excellency of our God.

Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees. Say to those who are of a fearful heart, 'Be strong, do not fear! Here is your God! He will come with vengeance, with terrible recompense. He will come and save you.'

Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy. For waters shall break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert; the burning sand shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water.