

Trinity 12 (2026)

I wonder if you have heard of Robert Hicks? If you haven't, no worries. I had not until a few years ago.

His story is as instructive as it is heartwarming and was the subject of a 2017 documentary.

Born during the Second World War, his early years were spent in an abusive household near Bath, England. It was the home from hell.

In it, there was no love, just violence, poverty and ridicule. Around age 6, his mother left home. His father's violent behavior escalated. Then young Robert was placed in various care homes.

Adding to his pain, in his early years he could only mumble. At school, he was judged a dull and stupid child.

That is, until a kind soul, a Christian worthy of the name, got him to a doctor who diagnosed his problem. The tip of his tongue was tethered by tissue to the bottom of his mouth. He was tongue tied.

A surgeon was engaged to unloose his tongue. After that, he began talking and never stopped.

Instead of being what one teacher referred to as a ‘waste of space’, he went on to publish 100 million pieces of Gospel literature, including a special edition of the King James Bible which he gifted to Queen Elizabeth on the occasion of her Golden Jubilee in 2002.

God is still in the healing business.

More than that, He is not tied to any particular method. At times He works through healing ministries in churches.

In our own congregation, we were blessed to have the Rev. Robert Burgreen. One of his God-given gifts was being able to see into a person's soul, pinpoint an unresolved issue (often one unknown to the suffering person himself), and pray and lay hands on him and bring rescue.

Lauren, his wife who remains a part of this congregation, can give you some specific instances where Bob did just what I have described.

But God also works through the medical profession. We Christians are not anti-science. A week ago Friday I pulled a muscle in my side and had to be taken to the emergency room in Ellijay. After two shots, one a steroid, the other a muscle relaxer, I was able to go home in much greater comfort.

For sure, God is bigger than any particular method, as we see illustrated in the ministry of Jesus in today's Gospel.

Those who brought the deaf-mute to Jesus brought him to be *touch* by Him. They assumed that was His method of operation.

But on this day, Jesus took a more circuitous route. He took the man apart away from the crowd and began what must have seem to anyone able to see from afar a strange combination of gestures.

First, He looked up. Then He put His fingers into the deaf man's ears. Then, he spit and touched the man's tongue.

It may have looked strange, but it makes absolute sense. Jesus, as the people at the end of the story exclaim, “does all things well.

In this case, Jesus' actions communicated with the man in a way a perfunctory touch would not have.

His gestures allowed the man to understand what was going on and to be an active participant.

Looking up said: what I am about to do is from God.

Touching his affected parts brought understanding as this operation went forward.

Even taking him apart from the crowd has significance.

People who are – as they used to be called ‘deaf and dumb’ -- often feel conspicuous.

When I first moved to Blue Ridge, there was a woman in town who could neither hear nor speak. When you went to collect your mail at the post office, sometimes she would be there. Often you could hear her making strange guttural sounds as she emptied her post office box. I doubt she knew she was doing it.

People who did not know her condition might be excused for turning and looking.

If she noticed them, she must have been embarrassed.

This did not happen with the man told about in this morning's Gospel. By taking him aside, Jesus spared him from the undue scrutiny of the crowd.

The **individualized touch** was Jesus' way. He wasn't tied to any particular method or formula.

There is a correlation here between what Jesus did and what I as a clergyman do. When, for example, I take a wedding or funeral, I often remind myself that while I have officiated at many such services . . . I have never officiated at this one.

Each one is unique because people are unique and have varying needs, temperaments and expectations. And so great sensitivity and the individualized touch of Jesus is called for.

Taking that thought further, the God revealed in Jesus deals with us, not *en masse*, but as people with our own identity. In John 10:3 we read: “**He calleth his own sheep by name.**”

God is a big God. He put the planets in place and keeps them in their respective orbits by the word of His power, yet He knows and cares about YOU. God so loved the world – yes! But more specifically, God loves you. Put your name in that blank.

Let this knowledge encourage you. Ours is not a cookie cutter God. He is the God of the individualized touch.

But there was something else about Jesus' approach to the healing of this man that we should not miss. That was the **sympathizing sigh**. In verse 34, we read: **“And looking up to heaven, he sighed.”**

Why do you suppose Jesus sighed? ///

It seems likely that He *sighed* for the same reason He *wept* at the tomb of Lazarus of Bethany.

It was because He saw all too clearly the pitiful condition of the fallen sons of Adam. Everywhere He looked there was disorder, disease, brokenness, suffering, pain and death.

His sigh on this occasion reminds us that the God revealed in Jesus is not some distance deity . . . one who on occasion looks down from His dwelling place on high and calls out some good advice.

No, in the person of Jesus, the living God has entered the fray on our behalf. He understands what you are going through at this very moment, and He cares.

The writer of Hebrews, speaking of Jesus, writes: **“For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin”** (4:15).

More than that, this God is doing something about the sorry state in which humans have landed themselves.

He sees we are “miserable (meaning ‘helpless’, ‘without power’) offenders” and is staging a giant rescue.

. This divine rescue operation is anticipated in Isaiah 35 where the Old Testament prophet says:

“Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing: for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert.”

The miracle Jesus performed in today’s Gospel says the time is now. God’s new week of creation has begun.

Jesus sighed because this thing Christians call sin – going our way rather than God’s – had made “very bad” the world God in the beginning pronounced “very good”.

Jesus not only sighed, though, He responded. He reached out to the man and brought healing. He wants to do the same with our ears, tongue, indeed every aspect of our lives. But it is not automatic. We have to say, quoting the hymn writer:

“Have thine own way, Lord! Wounded and weary, help me I pray! Power, all power, surely is thine. Touch me and heal me, Savior divine!”

Have you done that? If not, why not today? This could be YOUR day of salvation.

So far, we have looked at the individualized touch and the sympathizing sigh. We arrive now at the climax of today’s Gospel, **the powerful word**.

That word is *Ephphatha*. It’s Aramaic and has been left untranslated. It is the very word Jesus spoke to the afflicted man. It means, “Be opened.”

We all need “*Ephphatha*”.

First, our **hearts** need to be opened to the call to come follow Jesus. “In my hand no prize

I bring, simply to the cross I cling” gets the ball rolling. It’s the first step.

But we mustn’t stop there. We also need our **ears** opened, opened to His voice day by day. “Lord, what is my assignment for today?” Try asking that when you get up in the morning. Real Christianity is practical.

And finally, for our **eyes** to be opened . . . open to the beauty of creation . . . open to opportunities of service . . . open to those I can speak an encouraging word.

Ephphatha. A great Gospel word . . . a word for all seasons. Make it personal.

“Lord, I believe you can do for me what you did for Robert Hicks and many others. Pronounce your Ephphatha on me. Don’t pass me by while on others calling.”

May this be our prayer.