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“They were exceedingly astonished” (Mark 7:37).

Gen 3:1-8; Mark 7:31-37

Genesis needs only six verses to tell us the story of how sin and death entered God’s creation. Its vivid details are etched into human history, art and literature. A cunning serpent seduces the first woman to disobey God, the first man joins her, and humanity is cast out of Eden to wait for a savior to right their wrong. The serpent is a liar, but it knows how to appeal to the woman’s almost childlike curiosity and desire, promising godlike power if she and her husband dare to eat the forbidden fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden. Instead, by deceiving them and setting them against God, Satan ushers sin and death into the world.

In today’s Gospel, we see Jesus continuing his mission to restore the image and likeness of God in a man deprived of his human dignity by his inability to hear and speak. Jesus’ ministry has been wildly successful as sickness and evil spirits retreat from his gracious words and healing hands. But something is amiss, and Jesus is shifting his strategy. The Genesis story reminds us that Jesus had only recently encountered the same ancient seducer in the desert, which is what happens to a garden when evil takes charge.

Satan approached Jesus in the desert with the same lies he used to convince Eve and Adam that they should seek the highest good and be as wise as God. Likewise, Satan will help Jesus succeed as God’s messiah, win the world for God by feeding the hungry, working miracles, using the wealth and power Satan controls and will give him to do good, if only he acknowledges him. Jesus rejects this ploy because he knows that the world can only be saved by love, something Satan is incapable of because he denies God’s sovereignty.

Jesus has the authority to heal the deafmute, but his miracles are becoming the focus of his entire ministry, as huge crowds pursue him, hungry for bread and spectacle. Jesus sees the hidden hand of Satan in his very success, and so he withdraws with his disciples and begins to tell them that only by his suffering and death can he reveal God’s unconditional love for a sinful world. To accomplish God’s plan, he will be God’s Suffering Servant, taking on himself the sins of the world. This paradox of suffering to fulfill the Law and the Prophets will become the “Messianic Secret” that is understood only after the death and resurrection of Jesus. The Tree of disobedience in the Garden of Eden will become the Cross of Obedience on

Golgotha and the Tree of Life in the Garden of the Resurrection.

What sin once closed by separating humanity from God, Jesus reopens as he restores hearing and speech to the deafmute and sight to the blind. What sin revealed to Adam and Eve with fear and shame, Jesus will replace with the look of love that reveals God's friendship and grace.

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