

September 5, 2021 @ Trinity Bixby  
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Isaiah 35:1-10 + Mark 7:31-37

In your veins lies a code, that when correctly interpreted, teaches the stuff that makes you to... make *you*. Your genes form the blueprints that allows your body, cell by cell, transmitter by transmitter, to build muscle, attach ligaments, form bone, and even the proper place for organs to form. And it's no coincidence that gene and Genesis share a sound – they both derive from the Greek for “beginning.” Despite what you may have seen in movies and tv, however, a scan of your genetic code could not make an image of you as you are today – as you have spent a lifetime growing and changing. Every step you take, every injury, every pain you feel – it alters your genetic expression, ever so slightly. Your genes do not have will or consciousness – they can't tell whether you're pushing to be an Olympic athlete or determined to be a world-champion speed eater. Instead, they tell your cells things like, “if there's an abundance of this chemical, make this amino acid and attach it here.”

Simple building blocks – but as anyone who actually played with building blocks can tell you, you can make incredible things with simple blocks. And the more types of “simple blocks” you have, the grander the structure can be. This is the basis of computer code, too – using a simple set of logical instructions, computers can do fairly miraculous things. And unlike the random permutations of genetics, computer code is written, adapted, and intentionally guided toward new paths.

At the heart of computer code is its source code – that's the computer language that allows programmers to easily interact with the underlying machinery. Source code, in essence, translates human-readable commands into the binary language of the computer. It lets the computer understand what the programmer is telling it to do – and, through error messages, allows the programmer to know when the machine doesn't understand, usually because the programmer made a mistake.

Sometimes, though, the program seems to work just fine, but through hostile

user behavior or interactions with other running programs, the computer will do something unexpected. Usually, this is negative – stopping the program from running, or even crashing the whole system. But sometimes, these interactions lead to new ways of intentionally causing the effect. Without the source code, it's very hard to reproduce this unexpected behavior.

If computer code can create unexpected behavior, how much more so can genetic code? And unlike computer code, we've only recently begun to understand how the genetic code works at all, much less being able to diagnose emergent behavior in the system. But God, who created all the universe and set the genetic code in place, knows just how it all works. And not just the genetic code – God knows all about ecological balance, the interactions between life and geological systems, and even the gravitational interaction of the solar system and beyond.

So, when Jesus heals people – especially those who have life-long hinderances – it seems that he is able to understand the source code so well that he can change it. In our story from the Gospel of Mark today, Jesus heals a man who has been deaf since birth, and has difficulty speaking. Unlike many of the healing miracle stories, Mark gives us details of what Jesus actually does – he touches the man's ears and tongue, and then speaks a word in Aramaic. That word is *ephphatha* – which means “be opened” or “open up.” At that word, the man could hear and speak, as though he'd been doing so his whole life. Remember that at that time, there was no sign language that was mutually intelligible. Some may have designed simple signs with their family, but there was no sense of the hearing-impaired community that we know today. In opening the man's ears, Jesus relieved him of a burden and connected him to the community.

Many have written about the importance of *ephphatha* – the importance of Jesus telling this man, and us, to be opened. Be opened – hear the words of God, speak the words of love. Be free of the burdens we carry. Blossom in the freedom of God's loving care.

For as the Prophet Isaiah tells us, the opening of the ears of the deaf, the opening of the eyes of the blind – these things happen along with the blooming of

the desert. It is in the opening of the world that we know that God is present with us, the source of life and love and wellbeing. Even in the midst of difficult times, when all we can see is a barren desert around us – God is with us, calling us to see that even the desert is temporary, and that God will call forth life even in the most challenging, the most barren of places.

But we are free to close ourselves off from God. This is the most frustrating part of being human – even when we try to live into God’s way of love, we inevitably struggle with closing ourselves off to something that God is calling us to do. And yet, Jesus places his hands on our heads, and says, Be opened, again and again. We find freedom in the grace of God – freely given to us, just as Jesus’ healing was freely given.

Remember how computer source code works as a translation between programmer and machine? The scripture functions in much the same way for us. I believe we will never understand how reality itself is formed, and certainly not to the same extent of God, who knows how and when emergent behavior will arise. But in each Godly encounter recorded in the Bible, we see a glimpse of God’s instructions for us. In those glimpses of the open source, we see that we are called to love one another, called to help one another, called to be open with one another. To be truthful. To have compassion, not just on those we consider friends, but on those we believe to be opposed to us. In this way, we walk on God’s path, a path through the wilderness that once was barren, and now is springing forth with water and life. When we follow the open source of God, we are opened to connect with the world around us as never before.

And so, may you be opened by the Spirit, to follow Jesus’ Way, as the Source of all life causes the deserts of your life to bloom. Amen.