

September 5, 2021
Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost
St. Timothy Lutheran Church – Huber Heights, OH
Pastor Joel Sutton

Mark 7:31-37 (Isaiah 35:4-7; James 2:1-10, 14-18)

JESUS' WORD OPENS EARS AND LOOSES TONGUES.

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Amen.

Our text for meditation today comes from the Gospel according to St Mark the 7th chapter, which you heard read earlier.

Hearing and speech are precious gifts from God. Hearing and speech are closely tied together and are critical in the early years of a child's life. Between 16 to 18 weeks inside the mother's womb, a baby's ears are fully developed to hear. By the 26th week, the baby is recognizing and reacting to sounds from outside the womb. Following birth, as the child grows, they learn to speak by mimicking what they hear. First sounds, then syllables, then words, then sentences, which all lead to growth in knowledge and conversation.

When a child cannot hear, they cannot mimic sounds or syllables. In some cases, speech therapy can do wonders, but oftentimes the child will grow to suffer from various degrees of speech impediment, which in turn brings along social isolation, and emotional distress. Many use sign language and *hear* with their *eyes* and *speak* with their hands. We see this in today's text.

Jesus is traveling in the pagan region of the Decapolis. It's the same region that on a different occasion, Jesus cast out a legion of demons from a possessed man with super-human strength, sending them into a herd of pigs that immediately rushed into the sea and drowned. (cf: Mark 5:1–13) Being freed from his demon possession, the man went throughout the region proclaiming what Jesus had done and everyone marveled. (cf: Mark 5:20)

In our text today, some of the people hear that Jesus is back in region. They know that He is a miracle worker, so:

“... they brought to him a man who was deaf and had a speech impediment, and they begged him to lay his hand on him.” (Mark 7:31–33)

The text *doesn't give* a lot of details but what it *does detail* is six deliberate actions of Jesus, used in a sign-language manner, before He speaks His Word of healing.

- ***First***, he takes the man away from the crowd to a private place. Possibly, the privacy was to ensure that the man wasn't distracted by the crowd. If the man is alone with Jesus, he will be focused on Jesus and His actions.

- ***Secondly***, Jesus puts His fingers in the man's ears as if indicating to the man that something is going to happen with his ears.

- **Third**, Jesus' spits. We don't know exactly *where* Jesus spits, but in that day, saliva was a popular folk remedy used by physicians. (cf: Mark 1-8, Marcus, 473) So perhaps Jesus' spitting and then His **fourth** action of touching the man's tongue, indicated that he was about to receive healing of his tongue.

- **Fifth**, Jesus looked up to heaven, not to call upon power from heaven. No, Jesus is the Word become flesh, (cf: John 1:14) the very God who spoke creation into existence. But now is dwelling in His creation to save and restore what sin has corrupted and destroyed.

- **Sixth**, Jesus lets out a sigh... maybe out of frustration or compassion. He knows this is not what God intended at creation, that people would become deaf and mute, or blind, or lame. Neither this man nor any other is supposed to be deaf or have a burden of body or soul. It's a result of being a sinner living in a broken and sinful world. And that's why Jesus humbled Himself, leaving the glory of heaven and became man:

"... to bring good news to the poor... bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and... [freedom] to those who are bound." (Isaiah 61:1)

After letting out a sign, Jesus speaks His Word of healing:

"Ephphatha," that is, 'Be opened.' (Mark 7:34)

And the Word of Jesus does not return void but – indeed – it does exactly what it says. (cf: Isaiah 55:11) Just as on the first day of creation, when God said:

"Let there be light" (Genesis 1:3)

... immediately there was light. At Jesus' command, the man's:

"... ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly." (Mark 7:35)

No cochlear implant for hearing. No therapy for his speech. His ears were opened and his tongue was released. All those who knew and saw him:

"... were astonished beyond measure, saying, 'He has done all things well. He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak.'" (Mark 7:37)

The Lord of Creation, who on the sixth day of creation saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good, (cf: Genesis 1:31) has returned and continues to do all things well, restoring His creation broken by sin. He is the long foretold of Messiah, bringing the Kingdom of God into their presence, fulfilling Isaiah's prophesy:

"⁵ Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; ⁶ then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy. For waters break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert; ⁷ the burning sand shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water..." (Isaiah 35:5–7)

Isaiah points to the signs and evidence of the Messiah whose Word is living water, welling up to eternal life. (cf: John 4:14) He has come to reverse nature's corruption due to sin, ushering in a new creation like God originally had intended.

The gifts of hearing and speech are precious and are closely tied together. But Jesus wasn't concerned for the tongue and ears of this man *alone*, but for *all* tongues and *all* ears, hearts, bodies, and souls, of *all* mankind from Adam to the last human being yet to be born because

apart from Jesus, you and I are ruined by the devil and justly deserve God's temporal and eternal judgement. The devil had previously plugged your ears and tied your tongue. But St Paul says:

"... faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ."

(Romans 10:13–17)

It is the ear which apprehends God's Word and the heart grasps hold of the Word and believes – and then the tongue confesses what is believed in the heart. In the proclamation of the Gospel, our Lord comes to you and speaks his mighty "*Ephphatha*" into your deaf ears so that the Holy Spirit opens your ears and creates faith within your heart. The Spirit then looses your tongue so that you call upon the Name of the Lord in repentance, turn from your sin, and trust in Jesus for salvation. You can praise God for sending His Son into the world to defeat sin, death, and the devil on Calvary's cross. You can guard your tongue against taking the Lord's Name in vain. You can proclaim to your unbelieving neighbor the Good News of salvation in Jesus, the one who has the power to open ears, loosen tongues, and create faith in the hearts of poor miserable sinners just like you, granting forgiveness and eternal life.

Let's consider those in our text who brought the deaf man with the speech impediment to Jesus. We don't know if they knew Jesus as the Messiah or just as a miracle worker – but they did know that He was a Man of compassion who helped and heals those in need. Who was this deaf man to them? He was likely the same as the deaf are today: a social outcast who had suffered a lot of emotional distress. He wasn't a rich man, that the people might do this good deed for reward money or any sort of merit.

These people are a picture of the Christian who looks not only to their own interest, but also to the interests of others, loving their neighbor as themselves. (cf: Philippians 2:4) They showed no partiality but cared for the deaf man. They took time out of their workday to take the deaf man to the only Man who could heal him and beg Jesus to lay His hand on him. They didn't deserve to be heard, but because of the Word that had been proclaimed to them about Jesus, they had faith that He would answer their pleas – and He did! These are the good works that flow from faith. As you heard in our epistle reading:

"... faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead." (James 2:17)

The Christian cannot help but to good works. As we've heard multiple times over the past several weeks, you don't merit grace by doing good works. No. You're saved by grace alone through faith. (cf: Ephesians 2:8) God doesn't need your good works but your neighbor does. You do good works because it is God's good and holy will for your life. (cf: Ephesians 2:10)

The deaf man in our text is a picture of your unbelieving neighbor. He didn't do anything to deserve to be taken to Jesus. He was an outcast and did nothing to deserve to be healed. He likely didn't even know where the people were taking him. He merely was presented to Jesus who made heaven and earth. He wasn't healed because of the faith of the others – but was healed at the Word of God. Follow me here... those who took the man to Jesus are a picture of you dear Christian. You are saved by grace through faith and because of your faith you lead others to Jesus by sharing His Word of life. It is not your work but you sow the seed so that the Holy Spirit can speak His *Ephphatha* into your neighbor's ear and create faith in their heart.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, in the life giving waters of Baptism, our Lord spoke his powerful Word of *Ephphatha* into your formerly deaf ears and created faith in your heart. In response, you come to this place to repent of your sins and receive Christ Word of forgiveness and His Word of life, so that you trust in Him for forgiveness of sin, life, and eternal salvation.

Today your ears have been opened by the Good News of Christ crucified and risen for you. He alone is able to give you total healing, healing of both body and soul. And you have His eternal promise that on the Last Day He will raise your body from the grave and clothe it in immortality as He originally intended. (cf: 1 Corinthians 15:52–54) No more broken bodies, sickness, or disease. It's the Day when you and all who are in Christ Jesus will gather together to celebrate the feast of the Lamb in His Kingdom which has no end. Until that day, you continue to feast on His Word and Sacrament, trusting in His promises until He appears in glory and lifts you from this vale of tears and takes you to Himself in heaven.

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understand, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus,
Amen.