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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
September 12, 2021
16th Sunday after Pentecost

Scripture Lessons: Isaiah 35:4-7a; James 1:17-27

Hymns: 234; 777; A Wretched Man Both Mute and Deaf ; 50:1-2

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Mark 7:31-37

Again, departing from the region of Tyre and Sidon, He came through the midst of the region of Decapolis to the Sea of Galilee.

³² Then they brought to Him one who was deaf and had an impediment in his speech, and they begged Him to put His hand on him. ³³ And He took him aside from the multitude, and put His fingers in his ears, and He spat and touched his tongue. ³⁴ Then, looking up to heaven, He sighed, and said to him, “Ephphatha,” that is, “Be opened.”

³⁵ Immediately his ears were opened, and the impediment of his tongue was loosed, and he spoke plainly. ³⁶ Then He commanded them that they should tell no one; but the more He commanded them, the more widely they proclaimed it. ³⁷ And they were astonished beyond measure, saying, “He has done all things well. He makes both the deaf to hear and the mute to speak.” (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

In Christ Jesus, God our Savior, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: False impressions.

So often we here of people's first impressions of other people that turn out to be totally inaccurate. The problem with these first impressions can be that they are lasting impressions, even if they are terribly inaccurate. Maybe this has happened to you. It happens more easily in our day with all the social media. Sometimes people have images posted on someone else's page that puts them in an unfavorable light. Once it's posted on the internet it might last forever!

Well, we aren't the only ones who may be mischaracterized. This has been a persistent tactic of the devil since the days of Jesus' ministry. And yes, that means that in spite of the inspired record of the gospels testifying to the truth about Jesus, many people have inaccurate impressions of who Jesus is, and what He was and is about.

One of those impressions that is addressed by our text this morning is that Jesus was only concerned about the Jewish people, and that He only ministered to them. In our text Jesus is reaching out to the Gentiles! There are a number of other examples of Jesus reaching out to the surrounding gentile peoples, but it seems that people fail to take note of it. Perhaps our ignorance of geography leads us to pass over important notes of some the locations Jesus visited during His years of ministry. We should note for our own edification as gentiles, that in our text Jesus travels from one region of gentiles, that of Tyre and Sidon, to another, the region of Decapolis or the ten cities. How important it is to note how Jesus personally taught and ministered to the Gentiles!

The second misconception about Jesus is that His was a ministry of glory instead of a ministry of sacrifice that ultimately led to the cross. Setting aside this false impression concerning Jesus being about glory is central to properly understanding the gospel. The disciples themselves struggled with this false impression of Jesus. Many American preachers yet today slip into this gospel of glory rather than the gospel of the cross.

So how does this happen? It happens because people hear what they want to hear, and all too often people report what they find interesting or exciting, whether or not it's true. By nature, we have

a **hearing** problem that isn't fixed by hearing aids, and a speech impediment that originates from an unbelieving heart. --

THEME: Jesus Still Calls to Us, "Ephphatha," – "Be Opened!"

I. Were We Really Spiritual Deaf -- Mutes?

But wait, isn't it a leap for us to draw a spiritual lesson from a physical miracle? Not at all. We are told in many spots throughout the gospels that Jesus preformed many miracles of healing on a given day. In fact, in the chapter immediately before our text we are told: "*Wherever He entered, into villages, cities, or the country, they laid the sick in the marketplaces, and begged Him that they might just touch the hem of His garment. And as many as touched Him were made well.*" (Mark 6:56) Jesus healed many, many people, but the Holy Spirit caused the evangelists to record the details of only a few, that we might draw important spiritual lessons from them.

Jesus Himself taught spiritual lessons while performing miracles. He taught lessons concerning His authority to forgive sins, lessons concerning his lordship over the Sabbath law, and others as well.

Here, in our text, we learn from the miracle of Jesus delivering a man from a loss of hearing that also then impacted his ability to speak. The people in this gentile region of Palestine had heard of Jesus. When he arrived, they sought Him out that Jesus might help this man. There was a very large crowd gathered around Jesus, so Jesus took the man away from the rest of the people to secure some privacy. This was an important moment in this man's life, not only for his physical well-being, but also for his spiritual well-being. It was important that he comprehend fully the power of Jesus, not only to heal, but the power of Jesus to save. This man needed to know Jesus, to truly know Jesus.

Jesus communicated with the man by touching the man's ears, by actually spitting on His own finger and touching the man's tongue. Jesus was communicating a message regarding His healing power and what was about to happen, before Jesus stated the verbal command that would heal.

So it is that we ought to draw a proper lesson regarding our ability to truly know Jesus, and correctly understand who He is and why He came down to earth. You see, it is the gospel that our sinful nature tunes out, that our sinful flesh says that we don't really need, that our hearts refuse to hear. Oh, we can hear the words, but in our spiritual deafness we cannot comprehend the truth of salvation that Jesus came to secure for us by His sufferings and death.

Jesus taught in parables because of the Jews failure to properly hear the Word. This was especially true of the spiritual leaders of the Jews. Jesus explained to the disciples. *"Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand."* (Matthew 21:13)

The Apostle Paul wrote of this spiritual deafness: *"the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."* (1 Corinthians 2:14) Our hearing problem is a spiritual problem that doesn't discern, or refuses to discern, the truth about man's sin and its only cure -- the cross of Christ. That is where we also were by nature, on our own we couldn't hear the truth. Without knowing the truth of our salvation it is impossible to properly speak of Jesus to others.

Now it is important for us to note the power of Jesus' word! It is with His word that --

II. Jesus Opens our Hearts to Hear with Faith.

Our opening prayer this morning began, *"Lord open Thou my heart to hear, and through Thy Word to me draw near!"*

(The Lutheran Hymnal 5:1)

Jesus healed the deaf man with **one word**, *"Ephphatha!"* It means **"Be opened!"** With that command the man's hearing was restored. And as we will consider more a little later the impediment in his speech was also removed so that he could speak clearly.

The power of the gospel is what the Lord uses to open **our** hearts to hear as well. Jesus has sent His Spirit among us, and the Spirit uses the means of grace to open our hearts to hear. The gospel

comes to us in word and sacrament; it is the gospel message of God's love and forgiveness in Christ Jesus. The message of the cross which the world rejects as foolishness that is empowered to open our understanding that we might comprehend the wonder of God's grace extended to unworthy, and lost sinners.

Now we hear and our hearts are filled with peace and joy. Now we hear the sweetest of all benedictions, that the Lord blesses us with His love, that Jesus comes to us with His grace, and that the Holy Spirit calls us to faith so that we are once again in communion with the Lord, our God.

It is the power of Jesus' Word, it is His "Ephphatha!" that accomplishes the miracle that transforms our hearts so that we hear the wonder of the gospel of a crucified and risen Lord; and we believe, and are saved, and are granted the gift of eternal life.

Now, as we already mentioned this was sort of a double miracle. With the power of His command Jesus not only opened the man's ears to hear, but loosened his tongue so that he could speak. And so let us consider how --

III. Jesus Loosens Our Tongues to Confess His Name.

Jesus' compassion for sinners, Jesus' compassion for the hurting is a wondrous truth, but it is often a truth confounded. We have what many consider to be one of the strange commands of the Lord recorded in our text. He told the man, along with his friends and companions that they should **not** tell other people about this wondrous miracle. However, our text reports that the more Jesus told them not to tell others, the more they told others. Apparently, they couldn't help themselves. It was just too great of news! They felt compelled to tell others.

Why would Jesus make this request? It isn't spelled out completely in our text, but we do know that crowds, massive crowds came thronging to Jesus for physical healing, but physical healing was not the central focus of Jesus' ministry. Preaching the gospel, teaching the people about the kingdom of God, this was what Jesus wanted to accomplish. When the crowds, seeking only healing, became too large it hindered Jesus in His teaching ministry.

A second reason for this request of silence from the Lord had to do with that proper understanding of what Jesus was and IS about. Even the 12 struggled with Jesus' kingdom not being of this world, but that it was spiritual and heavenly in nature. Others would misconstrue what it was that was so wonderful about the Lord Jesus Christ and present Him as the One who makes this life better. Indeed, He does make this life better, but that is not the message Jesus desires to go out into all the world. The man Jesus healed may not have been spiritually ready in his understanding of the truth to tell others about Jesus.

A proper testimony regarding Jesus' power in our lives requires saving faith in Jesus for the forgiveness of sins and eternal salvation! This doesn't happen on our own. This happens as we stay in the Word and grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The Spirit continues to strengthen our faith through the hearing of the Word. The Holy Spirit leads us to confess Jesus' name before the world with understanding, so that others also know the hope that lives within us. Remember Paul's words to the Corinthians. *"No one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit."* (1 Corinthians 12:3)

Jesus' command to us is the exact opposite of what He said to the man He had healed that day. With the blessing of the Holy Spirit leading us into all truth, Jesus sends us out into the world with the gospel. Mark's gospel concludes with this commission: *"Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature."* (Mark 16:15) It is our **privilege** to do what the man in our text was asked NOT to do. It is our privilege to tell anyone and everyone what great things Jesus has done for us. WE ought to be as excited and eager to this as the man whose hearing and speaking was restored to him!

With the blessing of the Holy Spirit, we can bring the real meaning to the words of the people who heard about this healing, *"And they were astonished beyond measure, saying, 'He has done all things well. He makes both the deaf to hear and the mute to speak.' "* (v.37)

It is an astonishing truth! Jesus truly has done all things well! While the healing miracles amazed people, it is the spiritual hope,

life and salvation that Jesus has worked through His death and resurrection and through the power of His word that is even more amazing. It is AMAZING that by His death He atoned for us and redeemed us from death and hell. It is AMAZING that by the word of this gospel message the Holy Spirit has called us to faith in Jesus, and given us the gift of true spiritual hearing and loosed our tongues to sing His praise. It is AMAZING beyond measure what Jesus has done for us, and that it is all **done so well**, so that it is true also for you and me “*He has made the deaf to hear and the mute to speak.*” (v.37)

AMEN.

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.