

Rev. Danny Mackey
Twelfth Sunday after Trinity
September 4, 2022
Mark 7:31–37
Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church in Muncie, Ind.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

“He has done all things well. He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak.”

Our Lord is traveling throughout the region of Tyre and Sidon. That’s Gentile country. And while He’s traveling there, the crowds carry to Him a man who was deaf and couldn’t speak properly. They want to see a miracle. Jesus takes the man aside, privately. He does some rudimentary sign language. Sticking His fingers in the man’s ears, Jesus says, “I’m going to heal your hearing.” Then He grabs ahold of the man’s tongue, saying, “This tongue that doesn’t work, I’m going to fix that, too.” And then He looks up to heaven and sighs visibly, telling this man, “My Father who is above will do all this for you.” Then Jesus speaks the first word this man ever hears: “Ephphatha,” that is, “Be opened.” And the miracle happens. How does the crowd respond? They marvel. And no matter how much Jesus tells them to be quiet, they proclaim that Jesus does all things well.

What can we learn from this miracle? Why bother talking about it?

First, it teaches us what Jesus is capable of. Just consider the man’s speech impediment. As a child, I spent a couple years working with a speech therapist. She was very patient. She worked with me for two school years, helping me to articulate clearly. I still have a few struggles. Ls are particularly difficult for me. But, for Jesus, healing this man’s tongue wasn’t difficult at all. In but a moment, our Lord made this man to speak clearly. To speak as God intended him to speak.

The crowd responded to the miracle with “He’s done all things well.” That’s an echo of Genesis 1, an echo of God looking upon all that He made and saying, “It is good.” Jesus restores creation itself in this man’s body. He alone can, because He is the almighty God, the creator of heaven and earth and all therein. When we consider the wonders of what we can do with a little time and a bunch of resources—sending people to the moon, our advances in medical technology, the development of things like Artificial Intelligence—well, our God and Lord can do infinitely more. He is greater than man. Greater than man ever could be.

We know He’s greater because Jesus also heals the man’s hearing. Speech impediments are difficult enough to fix. Hearing is near impossible. Oh, we’ve got things like hearing aids

and cochlear implants—which are amazing. But many hearing problems can't be fixed. (And the fellow's speech impediment was caused by his inability to hear, right?) Jesus, however, with sticking His fingers into the man's ears and with a simple command, makes him to hear! A miracle, indeed.

So, because our God can do such great things, we can put our trust in Him. He won't disappoint. Man's efforts, no matter how great they are, will ultimately fail. Jesus won't.

The way our Lord touches the man teaches us another lesson. Second, Jesus doesn't shy away from our condition. In fact, He sticks His fingers in the man's ears and grabs ahold of the man's tongue. He gets right on in there. He's not concerned about sanitation or germs or catching whatever the man has. What with our struggle during COVID and our fearfulness of disease, we've drastically limited touching one another. Of course, some of it's also because we're afraid of someone saying we touched them inappropriately. So we just don't touch others at all. In fact, for a few parishioners, the most physical contact they have is when they shake hands with the pastor and vicar each week.

Our Lord took on human flesh in order to redeem us in our bodies. We require physical contact with other people. A baby nuzzles at her mother. Two brothers wrestle each other. A husband holds his wife's hand. Friends, upon greeting or bidding farewell, embrace in a hug. Two people shake hands upon striking a deal. Most certainly, we are physical creatures. Jesus doesn't shy away from that. In the case of our reading, He knew the man needed that touch, so He reached out to him and provided for the man's need. Our need, also. After all, God didn't create us—including this man in our reading—so that we will forever have deficiency. God created our bodies with the redemption in mind. Redemption accomplished in the flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ.

That's why Jesus cares for us in physical ways. He washes us with water. He feeds us His body and blood under the bread and the wine. He has us gather with one another, in the same place, at the same time, to hear His Word with our ears and praise Him in community. One of the means of grace, along with Baptism and Absolution, is the mutual conversation and consolation of the brethren. What a great gift Christ has given us with being with one another! What a great gift were those people who brought to Jesus the man who was deaf and had a speech impediment!

Bringing others to Jesus is a third lesson we're given. In fact, that's just how all of you got here, too. Think of who first brought you to Church and to Christ. It was my mother who handed me to the priest so that I might be baptized. It was my grandma who first taught me how to pray. That's what these people did for the man in our lesson.

The man needed them to. He was desperate. He couldn't help himself. This is how all of us were before we were saved. Spiritually dead, says St. Paul. The man was deaf, so He couldn't hear Jesus. The man couldn't speak properly, so he couldn't confess Jesus. We are here on this earth for others. So that others may hear of Jesus, see our good deeds, and perhaps come to faith. Our heavenly Father desires that all should be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth. That's why we're still in the world. That's the work His given for His Church to do. Each of us, in our vocations, are "little Christs" in the world. Because, just as God has loved and loves us, He also loves our neighbors.

Now, you might say, "I don't know what to say." And you might even point out that the Jesus told the crowd to stay silent. Jesus' command to stay silent went away at His resurrection. He told them not to say anything because He knew people would trust in the miracles and not in Him. But with His death on the cross and His resurrection from the dead in focus, then we can understand the miracles correctly.

Which brings us to our fourth and final lesson for this morning. Jesus' death and resurrection shape our understanding not of just this miracle but of everything. The creator of life died on a cross. In rising again, He conquered our sin and death and the devil. That's why He could heal this man, making him to hear and speak properly. The consequence of our sin, Jesus took on Himself on the cross. He paid for it there. So it's His. And so is that man's body. Jesus paid for him. And if Jesus wants that man's ears to hear and his tongue to speak, then they will.

Likewise, Jesus paid for us, both body and soul, on the cross. He justified us with His resurrection. He promises that we shall be with Him, both body and soul, for eternity. That includes our hearing and our speaking.

Jesus gives us His Word to hear. That Word is what all people need to hear. So many different voices fight for our attention. St. Paul warns Pastor Timothy of a time "when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the

truth and wander off into myths” (2Tm 4:3-4). That describes our time. Even some Christians have wandered from God’s Word and now rely on the myths of this world. As a result, when they try to speak of Jesus to others, they offer only empty and trite platitudes. Clichés. And those they would save are further emboldened in their sin.

But God’s Word is written in plain, clear language. God isn’t tricky or deceptive. He wants to be understood. He wants us to understand Him and His Word. We need only listen to it and take it at face value. After all, it’s written in black and white. It tells us our sin and need for a savior. It tells us the way things ought to be. How we ought to be. And, more importantly, it tells us how things will be for eternity. Because our God created us to redeem us and to restore us. He’s already done everything to make our salvation happen. So, Ephphatha. Be opened to God’s Word. Hear it. Trust it. Believe it.

And hearing that Word, our tongues are made to speak properly. Each time we come to Church, we speak of our condition: “I, a poor, miserable sinner....” We articulate saving faith in Christ: “Who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven...was crucified....” We are taught how to pray: “Our Father, who art in heaven....” And as often as we eat His body with the bread and drink His blood with the cup, we proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes.

Taught by God’s Word in the Liturgy, we then take that Word and speak it in our lives. “I’m sorry.” “I believe in one God in three persons.” “Just as Christ has loved me, I will love you.” “Let us pray.” “Jesus died for my sins and rose again so that I might live. And this promise of life is for you, too.” “I forgive you.” This is how Christians are given to speak. The Holy Spirit not only gives us this Word, but He also gives us the ability to speak it. Just as Christ Himself made that man to speak in our lesson.

We could learn many other things from this miracle. But, for this morning, this is sufficient. Having heard His Word read and preached, let us come to Christ’s Altar and receive the Word on our tongues.

In Jesus’ name.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep our hearts and minds in Christ + Jesus.