



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

Well, the kids are back in school, and our confirmation classes begin this Wednesday and Sunday Monday school starts on the 13th. I read a story this week about Christian education not being all it was meant to be. This story was told by pastor Steve Molin.

The pastor of a big church walked through the Sunday school wing one week and stopped into the 4th grade class. While he was there, he decided to see what the kids were grasping. “Joey” he said, “who knocked down the walls of Jericho?” Joey said, “Don’t look at me, pastor, I didn’t do it!” The pastor looked at the teacher for an explanation. “Well pastor, if Joey said he didn’t do it, he didn’t do it.” The pastor brought that story to the Church council and when they heard it, the congregational president said, “Pastor, let’s just fix the walls and take it out of the property budget.” UMMMMMMMM

Well, even though our church education is not always perfect, I can guarantee you parents that your child will be treated with respect. They will be safe and feel loved each time they walk into class. They will hear about Jesus, who I

pray they will come to know that He loves them as a unique and precious daughter or son.

And wouldn't that be wonderful if we could take that message out of our classrooms and share it with all the neighborhood kids. Heck, we should be sharing that with the adults in our cities, employees in large corporations and even the refugees from Afghanistan. We only need to listen to the news at night to see how many people do not know that they are a precious child of God and feel that love and acceptance in their souls. I fear most people do not feel valued and worthy of love from anyone.

Our Gospel story today is about two marginalized people. First, Jesus encounters a mother who comes to Him to advocate for her daughter who is possessed by an unclean spirit. Quite a unique story where Jesus does not heal her immediately or even go to her daughter. But rather he had an unusual comment, "Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." Wow sure sounds like Jesus is comparing her to a dog. Rather unlike the Jesus we know who would even go as far to lay down his life for our sins, right?

Well, this woman is from an area of non-Jews where the residents were considered sinners. They were notorious outsiders and believe it or not, the ethnic slur used by the Jews to refer to such people was "dogs". Still rather harsh for Jesus to use such a term. Maybe just maybe, Jesus was testing this mother. And we hear that she did not slink away, but rather held her ground as she replied, "Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." Wow, quick thinking on her part, but she is not giving up on getting her daughter healed. Jesus recognizes her faith, and we remember she had bowed before him prior to their verbal interaction. Jesus heals her daughter, and she is sent off toward home to find her daughter healed.

You see even a little of Jesus' power and love was enough to save her daughter and she knew it. Her faith even moved Jesus. He did not have to go to her home and touch the girl. He did not ask God, the father, to step in for healing. Jesus did not even speak it into being. The daughter was healed. Simple as that.

In our second story, the process of healing is much different. Our deaf and speechless man is brought to Jesus by his friends. They were the ones who asked for healing for their friend. Jesus reacted differently for this healing. He took the man aside for some privacy and put his fingers in the man's ears and

put some of his spit on his tongue. Then Jesus sighed as he looked to heaven and commanded his ears and tongue to be opened. And they were. He was healed and then Jesus ordered the friends to tell no one.

Two miracles in our text today. Very different, different in people, circumstances, healing methods, yet the same result complete healing. Jesus is able to heal anyone, anytime, anyway, He wishes. We just need to be open to asking and open to accepting His grace-filled love and forgiveness. No one has to stay on the outside looking in. Everyone can “be opened” or “Ephphatha” as Jesus said.

We as the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America are always drawing the circle large enough to include everyone possible. We try hard to put into practice the sentiments of St. Augustine that once said that the Church is the only organization in the world that exists for people who have not yet joined. I pray that none of you ever feel on the outside looking in. I do think that most of our members, no matter how long you have attended CTS are proud to say that this is your church. You share willingly your talents and skills to further the ministry of this congregation. “Christians Serving God by Serving Others”. And if you are a visitor here today, whether frequent or not, I hope you feel welcome here. Actually, I think we smother new people, and they are afraid to come back for fear of being asked to join the new choir or be put on the council!

Last week, we had a new couple that joined us for worship and felt comfortable enough, after being asked no less than 5 times to stay for our church picnic, that they did, and I think had a nice time. They even asked if I would officiate at their wedding in June of 2022.

Whether you are new, old or somewhere in between in your participation in the life of this congregation know that we are always here to help. After all the Gospel is a free gift to anyone who will listen and Holy Communion is God’s meal for us, all of us. You don’t have to be a member to worship here, sing in this sanctuary, participate in our ministry or come to the Eucharist. This is God’s church, and it is open to all. I think that is what God expects of all his Christian communities, to be open to everyone.

Yes, sometimes it is difficult to be in community together. It is not always easy to consider new things, especially when we are happy with doing things the way we have always done them. It is not always easy to listen to differing opinions. It is not always easy to share our thoughts and feelings with those

who oppose our ideas. We only need to listen with respect and learn to agree to disagree. All the traditions we have come to love really don't matter. They are all adiaphora at best. What really matters is that God loved us so much, each one of us, that He gave his only Son to die for us on the cross. That sort of grace is found nowhere else on earth I know of, and it is for all of God's children. Jesus suffered and died for all of us, you and me so we are forgiven and receive an abundant life here on earth. And He rose again to defeat death so all of God's children could have eternal life, one day in heaven.

Folks we have a mighty awesome God who loves us very much. We are his creation; His children just as were the mother and deaf man in our Gospel reading today. As we read more and more of Jesus' miracles it becomes easier to see that there will be surprises along life's path, but the biggest surprise is that we will always get more than we asked for or than we desire.

The woman whose daughter was possessed simply asked for the crumbs on the floor and she received the Bread of Life. The deaf mute simply wanted to hear, and he received his hearing and a voice giving him purpose in life. How do you imagine God surprising you in the coming weeks and months? He will not disappoint. We are part of God's family and there is a future for all of us if we are open to it. So, look to Jesus, God's grace and love will be yours. **AMEN**