

12th Sunday after Trinity: September 8, 2019**“Be Opened!...Now What?”**

Grace, mercy and peace be unto you from God, our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. Our text this morning is our Gospel lesson, Mark 7, especially these words, **“Mark 7:34-36.”**

Be opened. Easy enough to understand, but for what purpose? It is abundantly clear from our readings this morning that God’s Word works. It does exactly what He says it does. He said, “Let there be,” and there was. He said, “Be opened,” and it is. He says, “I forgive you all your sins,” and they are. He says, “This is My body...this is My blood given and shed for you for the forgiveness of your sins,” and it is.

God works through Word, and words are designed to be spoken and heard. Christ’s Kingdom stands only in the Word of God, and it cannot be dealt with except by the ears and the tongue. The tongue must speak it, and the ears must hear it, *“For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved,”*¹ and *“faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.”*²

Hearing and speaking go together. One cannot speak rightly, unless one hears correctly; this is true both physically and spiritually. One who is deaf from birth cannot speak with proper diction, because they have not heard it. One of the signs parents watch for in hearing problems, is their child not speaking properly.

Spiritually the same rings true. Wicked tongues are one of the biggest problems of the sinful flesh. The greatest harm is done by the piece of flesh that flaps behind the teeth. Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will leave a mark in places not seen by human eyes. Your words can crush me in horribly devastating ways.

The 8th Commandment directs us to put the best construction on everything. A Christian, with ears opened by Christ and a tongue loosened by His blood, is not a Firestarter; causing destruction to the reputation of others. Gossip and backbiting, lies and deceit are not joyful. A tongue’s wicked fire is put out as the blood of Christ is poured into your mouth, and coated in the Gospel; then the only words the Christian values are those that build up the body of Christ.

It is then a tongue set on, *“speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every*

¹ Romans 10:10

² Romans 10:17

joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.”³

It means even in hard conversations, times when emotions are high, and strong disagreements are had, the ears and tongue belong to Christ Jesus. He had disagreements. He had those who hated Him. He had many who were vehemently opposed to Him; both what He did and what He taught. He spoke and things happened.

While we are in Christ, we are not Christ. We speak and things happen, just not always in ways that we can see. His Word does not return empty. It accomplishes the purpose for which it was sent. This is why this Gospel lesson from Mark seems so strange.

If you were paying attention to the reading from Mark, you have to admit that there does seem to be a flaw with the premise. God’s Word works. God speaks, and things happen; BUT, Jesus commands the crowd to NOT speak. In fact, the more He commands them to be quiet, the more they speak. So does that mean God’s Word is not working in this particular instance? Did God forget to charge the batteries before He sent out this text? Did He dial a wrong number? Was there bad reception?

There have been all kinds of hypotheses and theological thoughts put forward over the centuries. One of the most common says Jesus was using reverse psychology; in other words, Jesus really wanted them to speak and share, so the best way was to tell them not to do it.

As a Psychology major, and as a parent, I get it. As a rebellious child of Adam, reverse psychology makes sense. If I am told not to do something, I will have to do it; just a little bit, so I can learn from myself. My parents tell me not to touch something, so, I will just wait until they are not looking, right? Who are they to tell me what to do? If you tell me I should go to the doctor, or get help, or talk to somebody, or not walk through this alone, I’m not going to listen. I want to do it by myself. I am proud, and honestly my pride causes me to not be that bright, because I don’t need help from anyone else.

Not only will I not listen, I will not put the best construction on what you said. Rather than hearing you speaking love, I will hear you speak in not-love, “You don’t really care. You just want to see me fail, or admit that I cannot do it; because it shows that you are better than me. Well you know what? I am an American. I am an adult. I’m not only going to do it; but I am going to do it better than anyone has ever done it in the history of ever!”

³ Ephesians 4:15–16

A wise man once told me, “If you want someone to do something, you have to make them believe that it is their idea.” This is the way of the sinful nature. So, was Jesus using reverse psychology? Absolutely not!

Here’s the problem. If Jesus was using reverse psychology, like you and I do, that would make Jesus to be crooked and deceitful; just like you and me. We use reverse psychology to twist others to get what we want. This is why many like this theory so much; it reads ourselves into the text of Holy Scripture. It is called Eisegesis – the practice of interpreting a text by reading into it one’s own ideas. If we can read ourselves into the text, if we can make Jesus more like us, then what we say and do might not be so bad. It softens the blow of the Law, and just like last week, we can say, “Thank you God. I have some bad things to work on, but at least I am not like that guy.”

That is a huge problem though, is it not? If Jesus isn’t using reverse psychology, if He is not secretly trying getting the people to do His will by tricking them into doing it, then we’re back to facing the possibility that maybe God’s Word doesn’t always work. Maybe there are some things that God’s Word has no effect on; things that God’s Word is powerless to change.

If we are honest, we have to confess that this theory seems plausible, or at least we hear it so much from the world that we start to give it credibility. After all, God says a lot of things that we ignore and disobey. There are lot of things in God’s Word, upon which we don’t put the best construction. Rather than hearing it for what it says, many try to argue it away or rationalize God to be just like me. God says, “You shall not,” but we do anyway. That’s not reverse psychology; that’s just plain not listening. It is simple disobedience. So we will do and say whatever we want, and if we are good enough, then at the end of life, God will forgive me anyways, right? Is that not how many talk, especially around death. So does God’s Word always work?

We must exercise Exegesis – the practice of explaining a text by what it actually says. Let’s go back to the original premise; that premise that God Himself presents to us throughout Scripture, again and again and again: God’s Word works.

It accomplishes exactly what He purposes. It never returns to Him void or empty. God never whiffs. He never swings and misses. Recall, ***“We know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.”***

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?”⁴ Remember also, “Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come.”⁵ See my sermon a few weeks ago.

What good can we learn from this crowd’s wrong and disobedient profession? On the surface, that may sound strange, perhaps even wrong, to say that the crowd was wrong. Disobedient? Sure...kind of, but wrong? ***“He does all things well. He even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak!”*** What could possibly be wrong with that?!

Just like last week, it comes down to faith; it comes down to what was in their hearts. It comes down to their motivation and understanding of who Christ was and what He was all about. This crowd looked at Jesus as nothing more than a popular family shaman, a magic man; a guy who could simply cure whatever ails you. “Got a problem? Jesus can fix that! Just sprinkle on a little Jesus and all your problems will magically disappear.” They didn’t understand who Jesus really was. They didn’t understand that His kingdom was not and is not of this world; that He wasn’t some sort of genie in a lamp who could or would grant you your every wish and desire, and give you the ultimate warm and fuzzy feeling you so selfishly crave.

This is precisely why Jesus was so adamant in telling them to be quiet. He wasn’t using reverse psychology to coax evangelism out of them. NO! He was serious. He really did want them to be quiet. He didn’t want a wrong, false understanding of Him and His messianic mission to be put forth. Such a self-centered, self-serving wrong focus; such unfaithful misinformation could, would, and does lead to rejection of the Truth of Christ and His Gospel. The greatest harm is done by the peace of flesh that flaps behind the teeth – ***The tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things. How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire! And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell. For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God.***

¹⁰ From the same mouth come blessing and cursing.⁶

This is precisely why Christ sighed before working such a wonderful miracle. He knew what was coming. He knew how others would wrongly perceive it and misrepresent it, and it bothered Him. It tore Him up. And yet...He still did it.

⁴ Romans 8:28–31

⁵ 1 Corinthians 10:11

⁶ James 3:5–10

Think about that. Think about all that Christ foreknew; all of our sin, all of our disobedience, all of our refusal to listen and obey, all of our using ears and tongues to tear and destroy, all of our not putting the best construction, all of the fires to reputations we set ablaze – He knew it all, and yet He still went to the cross.

His incomprehensible love for us is what led Him to persevere and push on all the way to the cross; all the way to the very depths of hellish wrath and torment. Just think of all the times Christ has sighed for you. “***Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.***”⁷ Or worse yet: “Father, forgive them, for they know exactly what they’re saying and doing. They know it is wrong; yet, they do it anyway.” I don’t know about you, but I shudder to think about how many times I’ve given my Lord and Savior reason to tell me to be quiet because I was giving Christ and Christianity a bad name.

And here’s the thing that’s often overlooked. People often think of Jesus only suffering for our sins on His cross. That’s simply not true. Jesus suffered for us in our place from beginning to end. At the very beginning of His life He shed His blood for us in circumcision, already beginning to fulfill the Law perfectly. We hear many times of how He felt such tremendous compassionate sorrow and turmoil in his inner-most being whenever He encountered people who were like sheep without a shepherd, harassed and helpless. The original Greek tells us that He felt *splagnidzomai*; that is, His guts were literally turning. He felt that pain and sorrow in His belly.

Even here today with the deaf and mute man, Jesus is taking this man’s suffering and maladies into Himself. This sinfulness didn’t just disappear into thin air! It was swallowed up by Christ, taken into Him. That’s gotta hurt!

Jesus knew what was coming. He knew what needed to be done. And He did it. It pained Him, to be sure, but He did it. He did it out of His love and compassion. That’s just who He is.

And Christ didn’t stop there. He persevered. He pushed on, all the way to Calvary; all the way into the bonds of death. Putting the best construction on it, Jesus willingly endured all the just and righteous wrath of His heavenly Father that was rightly reserved for us because we earned it. Jesus was forsaken by the Father, so that His righteousness could be proclaimed to a people yet unborn that He has done it.⁸ Jesus took your place. He willingly stepped in and laid down His life as an all-redeeming sacrifice for yours.

⁷ Luke 23:34

⁸ Psalm 22:1, 31

Brothers and sisters, that is what all of this is for; from beginning to end it is all for you – your forgiveness, your salvation, your eternal redemption, your adoption into God’s holy family. God knew all along how fallen and sinful and corrupt His creation would be, and yet He still sent His Son to die for it—for you. Jesus Christ fully knew what awaited Him before He ever gave up all of heaven’s majesty for a virgin’s womb, a feed trough bed, a bloody cross, and newly-dug tomb. He knew it—and He didn’t hesitate, not for a single moment. And when the high point of God’s plan came to fruition on that cross, Jesus didn’t let out a sigh of despair or defeat. Instead, He proclaimed victoriously one single word—*Tetelestai*, which we translate as, “It is finished!” With one almighty Word He let everyone know about it. And only then did He sigh a sigh of loving, grateful relief. He proclaimed His victory, and then He breathed out His last and surrendered His spirit.

Creation understood what was going on. That single Word of reversal, restoration, and victory worked. The earth shook. Boulders split. Tombs were literally burst open and the dead came back to life. “It is finished!” God Himself made it abundantly clear. The proof hung there lifeless, for all the world to see. The empty tomb on Sunday morning provided further proof; the veritable receipt that the bloody transaction of Christ for all people had been paid in full. It really was and is finished, in Christ and because of Christ.

Fellow redeemed in Christ, this is your reality, right now. You have been baptized into this earth-shaking, tomb-rending, life-giving reality. You have been baptized into Christ’s death and resurrection. His Word is true. His Word works! His victory is your victory! That’s reason to rejoice! And make no mistake: You do know the truth. You know the full truth of God’s Law and Gospel. By God’s grace and working, you do know the full truth of Christ Jesus and His means of grace. Your ears have been regenerated in the life-giving waters at the font, and your tongues have been covered by the blood of Christ. “Word of truth, to all truth lead us; Word of life, with one bread feed us.”⁹ Amen.

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

⁹ Word of God, come Down on Earth LSB 545:4

Prayer of the Church
Twelfth Sunday after Trinity
8 September 2019

Let us pray for the whole Church of God in Christ Jesus and for all people according to their needs.

For all the baptized, and especially for the saints here at Immanuel Lutheran Church, that our ears would be opened by the Spirit to the Gospel of peace and salvation, and that our lips would show forth our thanks and praise always defending, speaking well of, and putting the best construction on everything, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For the Church throughout the world, especially for our Synod, that God would bless all congregations, pastors and agencies to serve faithfully and without fear; and for an increase in faithful servants sent out into the harvest, that Christ's kingdom would be expanded, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For all pastors, that they would be faithful and compassionate in the exercise of their duties; and that they would speak the truth in love as they catechize the young and old, bring mercy to the sick and shut-in, provide counsel and care to those in need, pray for all under their charge, and proclaim the Gospel as those who recognize how much they need it themselves, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For good stewardship of God's creation, that we would seek to provide clean air, water and land to all peoples, praying always for God's providential care of the planet He has given to us, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For all in authority by whose service God provides for us the gift of order, including parents and family, our government, our police and firemen, and our military and schools, that God would give them strength and endurance to carry out their duties for the good of those entrusted to their care, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For those whom God has granted another year of earthly life, especially His servant *Jordan*; that they may grow in wisdom and grace, and that God would strengthen their trust in His goodness all the days of their life; let us pray to the Lord: **Lord have mercy.**

For those affected by Hurricane Dorian, for the sick, the frail, the dying, and those who are suffering in any way [*especially Dennis, Larry, and those name in our hearts,*] that God would focus them upon Christ and His love and restore them to health, according to His will; for doctors, nurses, therapists and all who tend our brothers and sisters in need, that God would bless them as they put the talents He has given them to good use, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For all who partake this day of the Holy Supper of our Lord Jesus Christ, that they would receive the very body and blood of Christ in true repentance and sincere faith and to their abundant blessing, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For the saints who have gone before us and now rest from their labors, let us give thanks to the Lord; that we would, by God's grace, be kept in their holy communion unto eternal life in Christ's kingdom, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

Into Your hands, O Lord, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in Your mercy; through Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. **Amen.**