

*And they bring unto him one that was deaf and had an impediment in his speech;
and they beseech him to put his hand upon him.*

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Like the paraplegic that was brought to Christ by his friends and lowered through the ceiling to the feet of Jesus, these friends, and what good friends they are, bring this man to Jesus *to put his hand upon him*. However, this man was a gentile and brought by gentile friends to Jesus. Yet, even though they are gentiles they have faith in Jesus and His abilities and they ask Jesus to simply lay his hand on their deaf and mute friend. The reputation of Jesus as a miracle worker had spread like wildfire among Jew and Gentile alike. But perhaps the Gentiles found it easier to believe that this Jesus who had worked so many miracles before, could have spoken one simple word and the man would have been immediately healed, as he had done for so many other miracles. But Jesus does more in this morning's Gospel than just place His hands upon a deaf and mute man.

Jesus does something rather curious; the Gospel reads that *He took him aside from the multitude*. St. John Chrysostom, the great 4th century preacher and Father of the Church, writes that *He takes the deaf and dumb man who was brought to Him apart from the crowd, that He might not do His divine miracles openly; teaching us to cast away vain glory and swelling of heart, for no one can work miracles as he can, who loves humility and is lowly in his conduct*. We are reminded of the Publican who prayed away from others with his eyes downcast, striking his breast and praying, *God be merciful to me a sinner*.

Jesus does not pray as the Publican or the Pharisee, *looking up to heaven, he sighed, and saith unto him, Ephphatha, that is Be opened*. Jesus looks up to heaven to God the Father, because he is sinless, because he is God in the flesh, in complete unity with the Father and the Holy Spirit. He looks up to heaven to remind us where He has come from, and to remind us that our healing comes from God above. Jesus would look up to heaven and sigh at one other miracle, the raising of Lazarus from the dead. But why does Jesus sigh? George MacDonald writes that Jesus sighs, *that they might believe that whatever cure came to them from the hand of the healer, came from the hand of God. Jesus did not care to be believed in as the doer of the deed, save the deed itself were recognized as given him by the Father. If they saw him only, and not the Father through him, there was little gained indeed. The upward look and the sigh were surely the outward expression of the link which bound both the Lord and the man to the Father of all. He would lift the man's heart up to the source of every gift. No cure would be a worthy gift without that: it might even be an injury*.

The Word that spoke the world into creation spoke to this deaf and mute man, the fingers which fashioned and created man ordained that hearing would be granted to this man's ears. Deaf ears were opened to the word of God, and a mute tongue was loosed to sing the Lord's praises. *And straightway his ears were opened, and the string of his tongue was loosed, and he spake plain.* These actions are literal and symbolic, and it is easy to see why He heals the ways that He does. Almost all other avenues of communication, save those of sight and feeling, were of necessity closed. Jesus could have spoken a word of healing, but could the ears have received it? By touching the gentile's ears and tongue, Jesus awakens his faith, and stirs up in him the lively expectation of a blessing. The fingers are put into the ears to bore them, to pierce through the obstacles which hindered sounds from reaching the seat of hearing. In this way his ears and tongue were restored to their natural function, the function which God had intended for them.

And He charged them that they should tell no man, but what would you do if your ears had just been opened. No word from anyone, maybe not even from the Lord Himself could keep you from telling everyone around you what wonderful miracle you had just experienced. Even if you tried to keep it a secret, your happiness would give the secret away. And so we read that *the more he charged them, so much the more a great deal they published it. They were beyond measure astonished,* who else can heal but God Himself? Of course, *He hath done all things well; He maketh the deaf to hear, and the dumb to speak.*

A few chapters later in the Gospel of Mark we read that Jesus heals another deaf and mute man, though that healing required an exorcism. And we read too in the Gospels that the last healing Jesus worked before His arrest and crucifixion was healing the servant's ear which Peter had cut off in the garden. We do not think much of healing ears and yet the writers of the Gospels took the time to record at least three instances of ears being healed. And Jesus is still making the deaf to hear and the dumb to speak. We pray for who are physically deaf and mute, but do we pray for those who are spiritually deaf and mute? Be assured, that there are far more who are spiritually deaf and mute than those who are physically. How many of us, how many of our own families are spiritually deaf to the voice of God in our lives? How many are deaf to the Gospel? And how easy it is to not be able to hear God's voice, or His Gospel, over the racket of the world. And how horrible it is to be spiritually mute, to not be able to pray, to not be able to praise God. But how could we expect to, if we are spiritually deaf?

Some are spiritually deaf and mute because they choose to be. They have selective spiritual hearing, and they choose not to use their tongues to praise God,

instead they hear everything else, they tune God out, and tune into the world. Their tongues are mute to the praise of God, but fluent in cursing and gossip. And what can be done to heal the spiritually deaf and mute? For some the Gospel is enough to open the ears and even the eyes, and to loosen the tongue; but for others the Lord has to take them apart from the crowd and bore his fingers into their spiritual ears. It requires the healing of the soul, the removal of sin, to restore the spiritual ears and tongue to its intended purpose. But the Lord is ready and willing to do this, even this very morning. Amen.