

Sermon Notes – July 11, 2021

(Mark 7:31-37)

When you first look at this scripture passage, you almost think, “O, wow! It’s one of Jesus’ healing miracles again.” He’s healed a man who is deaf and mute. ***The story is about a man who lacked the physical ability to hear and to speak, but it’s more so about our inability to spiritually hear and perceive who Jesus is and what he asks of us in our lives.*** How many of you have ever been accused of being “hard-of-hearing?” Well, some of us are physically hard-of-hearing. I’m hard-of-hearing in my left ear. Sometimes we hear, but we don’t hear, do we? We aren’t listening too well. How many of you remember having teenagers in your home and when you say you’re getting food, they are ready to go just like that? But, when you say the trash needs taking out, clean your room, or the yard needs mowing, have you noticed that it may take five times before they hear and get moving and get out? They are a little hard-of-hearing, aren’t they? Maybe, they have selective hearing. *We, adults, also have selective hearing, don’t we?*

I heard a cute joke (and I told this one before, so bear with me). This elderly man was hard-of-hearing and his family kept saying, “Dad, just go to the doctor and get you some hearing-aids.” Finally, one day when they didn’t know it, he went and got hearing-aids. They were so small that you couldn’t tell they were in his ears, and he didn’t tell his family. About six weeks later, he went to see the doctor and the doctor asked, “How are you liking your new hearing-aids?” He said, “I love them.” The doctor asked if he had told his family. He said, “No, I haven’t told them, but I’ve changed my will three times.”

Sometimes we have selective hearing, don’t we? We hear what we want to hear or what we’re able to hear at the time. Sometimes, people can get bad news and they can’t take it all in at one time, so we have selective hearing. Sometimes, we are preoccupied thinking about what we’re going to say next and we don’t hear. Sometimes, we’re so preoccupied with something that’s going to happen that day or last week or this week that we don’t hear. So, we have a problem of hearing.

Jesus, in this story today, was talking to his disciples and to us. You see, the disciples didn't perceive who he was or what he was doing. Jesus went and healed a man, and he looked up to the heavens as if he were looking to God the Father. Then he said, "Ephphatha" - meaning, "be opened," to the man. It says the man's ears were opened and he could speak clearly.

Sometimes, we don't hear because we don't listen well. The disciples didn't listen very well. In fact, if you'll look in Mark, chapter 8 (the chapter after the one we just read), the Scribes and Pharisees come to Jesus and they want Jesus to give them another sign. He's just healed people; he's just come off of feeding the 4,000 people; and they are asking for another miracle - another sign. Jesus looked at them and said, "I'm not going to give you another sign." Then, he gets in the boat with his disciples. Peter gets in and he says, "Lord, we don't have enough bread. I only brought one loaf." He's worried about bread. Jesus looked at the disciples and said, "Have you guys just forgot that we fed 5,000 people - and what did we have? 5 loaves and 2 fish? How many full baskets did you take up?" They said, "Twelve." Jesus said, "Did you forget the feeding of the 4,000, and how many full baskets did you collect?" They said, "Seven." Jesus said, "*Do you not get it yet? Do you not understand who I am - what I am about?*" Jesus was in-essence saying to them, "Guys, don't you remember in the Old Testament where Isaiah the Prophet said, 'When the lame walk and the blind see and the deaf speak and hear, the Messiah is in their midst?'" These guys knew the Old Testament scriptures, and Jesus the Messiah had been showing them, been talking to them, speaking his word, and sharing his love with them, and they still weren't getting it. Do you think there are times when we don't get it? ... I think so.

There's a story told by a Preacher about getting called in the middle of the night to come to a home of a family whose daughter had locked herself in the bedroom and was threatening suicide. The parents said, "Pastor, please come quickly to our house." So, he went to the house and he was able to talk the girl into coming out of her room, and sitting down in the living room with her mom, dad, and brother. He said that all they

did was shout at each other. It was just one person's word against another - back and forth - bickering back and forth. Finally, he said, "Stop." He asked the girl to come into the kitchen and sit down at the table with him. He told the others to stay in the living room. He went in and asked the girl what was going on and what was troubling her. She said, "Pastor, my parents have given me everything in life that I could want - new clothes, jewelry, a new car, a new school, etc. They've given me everything I could want, but what I really want is their time and their love. My parents don't ever have time for me. They never sit down, talk to me, or listen to me. They're too busy doing, going places, and giving me things. I just want to spend time with them and know they love me." They weren't hearing what she really wanted, were they? I wonder how many times in marriages, in relationships with our children or our parents, that our problem is that we listen, but we don't hear and understand? That's what Jesus was accusing those disciples of - listening, but not really understanding. "I tried to tell you who I am and what I'm about, but you do not perceive. You're not getting it. I want you to really listen and hear what I'm saying."

When I was first starting out in ministry, I worked with teenagers a lot. One of the things they complained about the most was that their parents did not listen to them. "Ms. Peggy, they don't really hear me." I heard a cute story about a 5-year-old little boy who was in a restaurant with his mom and dad. They sat down and were ordering their lunch. The waitress asked the little boy, "What would you like for lunch?" He said, "I want a hamburger and a chocolate shake." The mother said, "No. He'll have fried chicken with mashed potatoes and green beans." When the waitress was walking off, she asked the little boy, "What did you want on that hamburger?" He said, "Ketchup." She asked, "What kind of shake did you say?" He said, "Chocolate." And, guess what he got for lunch that day? ... A hamburger with ketchup and a chocolate shake. When the waitress walked off to go get that order, the little boy looked at his mom and dad and said, "Mom! She thinks I'm real!" Can you imagine?

Sometimes, we don't listen well, do we? That's what Jesus was accusing us of. When he said, "be opened," I think he was talking about having

open minds that see God at work; to have open eyes to see the beauty of God's Creation and the opportunities to join him in what he's doing; to have open ears to hear his voice and his Word. How many times does he tell us to "forgive as I have forgiven?" "Love one another as I have loved you!" "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be the children of God." "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled." How many times do we really hear what Jesus says and then do it?

Jesus is calling us to hear and understand. Here were these disciples who walked with him day-in and day-out. He was telling them who he was, and they weren't listening too well. Do you remember when Jesus was on the Mount of Transfiguration and the voice of God was heard? God said to Peter, James, and John, "This is my beloved Son. Listen to him!" The Old Testament, Samuel said, "Speak, O Lord, for your servant is listening." I wonder how many times we change that and say, "Listen, Lord, your servant is speaking." How often do we do that, more than listening? ***God wants us to listen to his voice, his teachings, his Word - to open our minds to new ways of thinking and new attitudes for him to transform and heal us.*** You see, that man that day was not only healed of his deafness and his ability to speak, he was healed spiritually. I believe that he went on to tell others what he had experienced - physically and spiritually.

God wants us to listen not with the ears of our head, but the ears of our heart. ***When we experience him in all those different ways, we want to share it with one another.*** How well do we listen? What's the old Verizon commercial? ... "Do you hear me now?" I wonder how many times God says that to us? "Do you hear me now? I'm speaking through my Word, through music, through nature, through Worship - all these ways, ***but are you really hearing me... and understanding and perceiving who I am, what I'm about, and who I've called you to be as the people of God?*** -- Forgive. Love. Care for one another. Do you really hear me?"

"Speak, for we, your children, listen, O Lord!" Amen.