

9 September 2018

Text: Mark 7:31-37

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

It was a difficult life for the deaf mute that we encounter in our Gospel text this morning. His disabilities made his life challenging. Not only was he unable to hear someone speak to him but when he spoke to others, the words came out in such a way that was hard to understand. His being a Gentile only added to the challenges he experienced, a trifecta that caused him to be treated as an outcast to many around him, including the church.

We aren't told a lot about this man and we aren't told anything about his faith. Having grown up deaf and mute, it is unlikely that he had heard about all the wonderful things that Yahweh had done for His people Israel. Given that he was a Gentile; he probably would have heard even less if he had heard anything at all. Whatever he would have heard would have come from whatever friends and family he may have had. The point is, this may have been the only opportunity this man ever received to see Jesus.

So when Jesus arrives on the scene, the crowd gathers and people who know this man lead him to our Lord, begging Jesus to lay His hands on him and heal him. So the man is taken aside from the crowd and Jesus touches the man's ears and spits. Then Jesus takes and touches the man's tongue and speaks the Aramaic word, "Ephphatha" meaning, "Be opened". At that very moment, for the very first time, the man could hear and his speech became clear.

What a miracle! A man who had been born deaf and mute, finally after all these years, could hear and speak plainly. That is the stuff of front page news and nightly news reports. The headline could read, "Local Man Healed by Miracle Worker." It was indeed a miracle but, alas, not one that Jesus wanted to people to know for He knew that when word spread, they would see Him as just that, a miracle worker, and not as the Messiah who came to save them from their sins and heal their wounded hearts.

Today, our Lord brings us to His Word and there we see and hear through the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts that we are like the deaf mute in our text this morning. Our ears are stopped up, if you will, to God's Word. It's difficult to hear what He says to us when His Word rubs us the wrong way, when we don't like it, when we feel threatened by it. We'd rather hear more about how we are good people who should do good

things rather than listening to His Word say, we are lost sinners in need of a forgiving Savior. Our tongues have been tangled up and tied, preventing us from loving our neighbors, from telling others about God's love for them on the cross.

And it is quite interesting how our ears and tongues work. We hear what we want to hear and the things we don't want to hear go through one ear and out the other. And our tongues definitely work. We have no problem taking our Lord's name in vain, demolishing others characters and reputation. Our tongues are very good at using our Lord's name as an expletive when we stump our toes. We use our tongues like serpents, slithering gossip about others as easily as we change our clothes. We put others down while building ourselves up to look better than everyone else around us when in reality we are poor, miserable, sinners just like the everyone else.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, our ears are plugged to the Good News of Jesus Christ and our tongues rather speak ill of others than speaking in Christian love to them because we are sinners. We sin because sin is appealing. It's disguised as beautiful tasty fruit on the outside while it's rotten to its very core. Because we eat of it, we too become rotten, evil, wicked. As a result, we are no longer able to speak the truth in love because the truth is not in us anymore. We cannot hear God say, "I love you. I forgive you. I am with you always" because sins appeal whispers that it's easier to doubt what God says than to try to make sense of it by faith.

But fear not, for all hope is not loss. Rather, Jesus comes on the scene for us as He did for the deaf mute in our text this morning. He comes for us and He touches us. Because His Words still touches our ears, our tongues are loosed and we speak plainly, confessing that we have indeed sinned against Him in thought, word, and deed. And because of the Holy Spirit's work in our hearts, when our ears hear and our tongues confess, then Jesus speaks "Ephphatha", "Be opened", allowing us to be healed with His promise that "Our sins are forgiven through the shedding of Jesus' blood for us on the cross."

We are brought here every week, to our Lord's house, brought by the Holy Spirit where the fingers of Jesus are put into our ears and the Gospel that we could not hear, now we hear fully. He takes the sin that filled our ears with lies upon Himself and replaces sin, death, and the grave with eternal life and salvation. When we are brought by the Spirit to the Lord's table, our tongues taste the same body that touched the ears and tongue of the deaf mute. The same body that touched him touches your tongue, lips, and throat in His true body broken for you, His true blood poured out and shed for you for the forgiveness of all your sin. The same body that was buried in the tomb and raised

for you on Easter morning, touches your forehead and your heart in the waters of Holy Baptism, marking you as His dear precious child. When we make the sign of the cross, the Holy Spirit leads us to the font where God first saved us, His blood pouring over us as His grace flowing down and washes away every sinful thought, word, and deed that we have.

Finally, because our ears have been open and our tongues have been loosed, we can now use our tongues by going to our friends, families, and neighbors, telling them of what Jesus has done for us and what He has done for them too. Our ears have heard His Word declare that this day our sins are forgiven because they are in Christ death for us on the cross alone. That is the message that our loosed tongues can now confess boldly and without fear or reservation. Use your tongues to share the Gospel with others. Use your opened ears and loosed tongues to confess your sins to them and to ask their forgiveness. And use your opened ears and loosed tongues to forgive those who have trespassed against you.

It was indeed a difficult time for the deaf mute in our Gospel text this morning. But it was made better by the Savior who came and touched and healed him. Our difficult times are made better too by the same Savior who loves us and touches us by opening our ears, loosening our tongues, and healing our hearts as He saves us. Thanks be to God. Amen.

Now may the peace of God which surpasses all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.