

**In the Name of the Father and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.**

**Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ and may our Lord and Savior sanctify you in the truth, for His word is truth. Amen**

**Twelfth Sunday after Trinity (2021)**

**He Who Has Ears, Let Him Hear**

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***“And looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, “Ephphatha,” that is, “Be opened.” And his ears were opened, his tongue was released.” (Mark 7:34–35a, ESV)***

Often, we consider the plight of the deaf, lamenting their infirmity while thanking God that we do not suffer from such a malady. How awful, we conclude, it is to be unable to hear, to listen to the voice of our parents, or the sounds of nature, or the voice of a marvelous singer, or the sounds of an orchestra. So we place our sympathies with those who have lost the ability to hear, and thus to marvel at the sounds of worldly things. But what about the spiritually deaf? What of those who are unable or unwilling to hear the voice of God? Do our sympathies run as deep? Consider your sympathies toward the unchurched and those who have not been brought to faith through the Word of the Gospel and tune your ears to the words of Jesus in today’s Gospel Reading as He heals a deaf-mute, as He shows us that He desires that everyone would hear His Word. He says to us, ***“He who has ears to hear, let him hear.” (Mark 4:9, ESV)***

We read in the Book of Acts that at his trial, Stephen said to his accusers, ***“You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you.” (Acts 7:51, ESV)*** Enraged at his words, St. Luke tells us, ***“They cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together at him.” (Acts 7:57, ESV)*** They stopped, that is, closed their ears. They did not want to hear what Stephen had to say. This is natural man, who in his natural state is deaf to the Word of God, unable to hear God’s message of salvation through the Gospel or His warnings of condemnation for violators of His Commandments of the Law. Driven by the flesh, unregenerate man says, “Life is what I make it. Moreover, I don’t need anyone’s help. So this God stuff is sheer foolishness. It is the propaganda of weak, foolish men. How can someone believe in what they cannot see, touch or taste?” Not only do such people have their ears closed to the Word of God, but their eyes as well. Although they live in a world filled with wonderment, filled with the truth that they live among creatures and things that could not have created themselves, a world of unexplainable miracles, they lack the intellectual curiosity to ask, how can these things be? So they are content to live in a world whose only future is their grave. Such people are the lost, resident aliens of the kingdom of God, separated from Christ, ***“strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.” (Ephesians 2:12, ESV)*** But this is not how our heavenly Father would have them live. Therefore, He sends His beloved Son into this world to open their ears to hear His Word and to give them life, life eternal with Him and His Son in heaven.

This morning we listened to the voice of Isaiah say, ***“In that day the deaf shall hear the words of a book, and out of their gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind shall see.” (Isaiah 29:18, ESV)*** ***“That day”*** is today. It is every day since the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. Our Lord Jesus came to give eternal life to those who hear His Word and through hearing are brought to saving faith in the Gospel. Thus, the account of the healing of the deaf-mute in St. Mark’s gospel, is symbolic of our Lord’s healing of our deafness, of our Lord bringing us to faith by curing our deafness. St. Paul says it so clearly in his letter to the Romans, ***“So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.” (Romans 10:17, ESV)***

In the Gospel Reading for today St. Mark tells us that Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem from Tyre, through the region of Decapolis. This country was primarily occupied by gentile believers. As He enters the region, a crowd brings Him a deaf-mute and asked Him to lay His hands on him and heal him. Then St. Mark writes that Jesus, ***“taking him aside from the crowd privately . . . put his fingers into his ears, and after spitting touched his tongue. And looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, “Ephphatha,” that is, “Be opened.” And his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly.”*** (Mark 7:33–35, ESV)

Miracle of miracles, this man who had lived without the ability to hear or speak plainly can now both hear and speak without issue. He can now rejoin society unencumbered by his impediment. Now St. Mark tells us that Jesus put His finger in the man’s ears, spit and touched the man’s tongue, and looked up into heaven and sighed. But all of these gestures by our Lord Jesus were not what healed the man. No, it was the voice of Christ that healed. Jesus spoke and the problem is solved. ***“Ephphatha, Be opened”*** these words accomplished the healing. This is how Jesus solves our problems, He speaks.

There is no other solution for the problems of man. Oh sure, we seek and create cures for sickness through medicine. We seek and find methods to overcome poverty. We seek and gain knowledge through education. But not one of these issues is the biggest issue facing man. These are all answers to the issues that plague the kingdom of man, they are not the answers which lead to residency in the kingdom of God. What happens to man’s soul after death? How does one obtain eternal life? As long as man remains an alien to God, he will never desire the answer to the most important question of life, and that answer comes from only one source, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Jesus must open our ears so we can hear the saving word of the Gospel. This is how He comes to us, through hearing his Word.

St. Paul knew this truth for it was Christ who came to him as he went about his business of persecuting the Church of Christ. Although his encounter with Jesus was much more than hearing the Word of the Gospel, he said in his letter to the Romans, ***“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith.”*** (Romans 1:16–17, ESV) The Gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes. Everyone, Jew and Greek.

In asserting that he is not ashamed of the Gospel, St. Paul implies he is honored by the Gospel. He considers it an honor to have been chosen to proclaim the Gospel, for it is the Gospel which reveals our Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior from sin, death, and the devil. It is the Gospel which creates faith. Furthermore, only those who are blessed by God with the gift of faith are declared righteous and live by faith. But none of this is possible by the strength and will of man. This blessing of God comes from Him alone, through hearing the word of the Gospel.

Most interesting is that St. Mark begins today’s Gospel Reading telling us that Jesus is traveling through gentile territory. A territory and people which most Jews shunned. But our Lord wants all men to be saved not just Jews but Greeks also. Greeks, St. Paul’s euphemism for everyone who is not a Jew. The Gospel is to be proclaimed throughout the world, in every land, country, city, village, and home. Jesus commanded His apostles to, ***“Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation.”*** (Mark 16:15, ESV) Moreover, as we live in these last days, watching nation rise against nation, natural disasters, famine, and sickness, we know that the end is coming and will come, but ***“the gospel must first be proclaimed to all nations.”*** (Mark 13:10, ESV) And that Gospel is proclaimed through God’s called servants.

St. Paul asks, ***“How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?”*** (Romans 10:14, ESV) Through this mean, through His under-shepherds of Christ, God is found by those who do not seek Him, He is shown to those who have not asked for Him (Is. 65:1; Rom. 10:20). Through the proclamation of the Gospel the Holy Spirit comes upon man and opens his ears and his heart, giving him the gift of faith to believe in Christ Jesus as Lord and Savior. This is affirmed by St. Paul when he writes, ***“In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit,”*** (Ephesians 1:13, ESV) Again, he writes, ***“no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says “Jesus is accursed!” and no one can say “Jesus is Lord” except in the Holy Spirit.”*** (1 Corinthians 12:3, ESV) And finally, he writes, ***“And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit,”*** (1 Thessalonians 1:6, ESV) Having been brought to faith, now, according to St. Paul, our offerings, ***“may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.”*** (Romans 15:15–16, ESV) It is our Lord Jesus, through the Gospel gift of faith, who delivers us to His Father as His Father’s people.

Again, it is Isaiah who told us that a day will come when, ***“the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped;”*** (Isaiah 35:5, ESV) By inspiration Isaiah was led to see the joyful day when God would send the Messiah into the world. Thus, Jesus, would work out the redemption and salvation of all men. Jesus, who is our Savior, would restore sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, strong step to the lame, and speech to the mute. All these things took place during His ministry. His compassion would reach out to men. The Water of Life, our Lord Jesus Himself, would bring drink to the thirsting and parched throats of men. He who is the Bread of Life would stifle and still the pangs of hunger and satisfy the desire in men for spiritual food. He is the answer to the needs of the world, and the wants and desires of the human soul. All these things are met in Jesus. Isaiah prophesied this, as he saw the establishment of this great and beautiful Kingdom filled with those who through faith would become children of God, God’s chosen ones, the ransomed family of Christ.

This is you and I; we are the ransomed of Christ, pilgrims on a pilgrimage to heaven. We are those who through God’s grace and the power of the Holy Spirit are led to see Jesus, the Savior of our souls, our Substitute who ransomed us from sin, death, and the devil. We are God’s children through faith and trust in Him. We stand in the same relationship with God as did Isaiah and the people of his day. We stand in the same relationship with God as did St. Paul and the people of his day. Isaiah, St. Paul, and all who believe in the Messiah and the promises of the Gospel are brothers and sisters in Christ, living for and looking forward to the promises of eternal life with Jesus and all the saints who have gone before us.

But until that day comes, we seek our Lord Jesus through Word and Sacrament ministry where the Word of the Gospel is taught in all its truth and purity and His Sacraments are distributed according to His command. We seek His Word of the Gospel and His Sacraments where these Means of Grace can be found, in Divine Service on each Lord’s Day. There, in Divine Service, our Great Shepherd, Jesus, speaks to us through the mouth of His under-shepherd, the pastor, whom He has called to care for the souls of His people. Jesus tells us, ***“For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.”*** (Matthew 18:20, ESV) Thus, He promises to be with us in Divine Service for there we gather in His name. Knowing that He is with us and is speaking to us, then like the crowd who brought the deaf-mute to Jesus because they couldn’t help him themselves, you who have friends suffering from all sorts of problems, problems you can’t fix, bring them with you to Divine Service for here they will find and hear Jesus who is both willing and able to help them. What greater love is this than to bring your friend to the One who laid down His life, not just to be our friend, but to be our Savior. So bring the spiritually deaf to hear the voice of Jesus that they may be healed of their spiritual deafness. When Jesus speaks,

He reminds us to listen, saying, ***“He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”*** Then, out of His great love He helps us hear, saying, ***“Ephphatha, Be opened.”*** In the name of Jesus. Amen.

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.