

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 (2022)

Christ, Our Compassionate Savior

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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, and he spoke plainly.” (Mark 7:34–35, ESV)

In the Gospel Reading for today, St. Mark traces the path of Jesus after He has healed the Syrophenician woman’s daughter, following Him as He travels to the region of the Decapolis, where He heals a man who is deaf and has a severe speech impediment. This miraculous healing is recorded only in Mark’s gospel, but the church harmonizes it with the feeding of the four thousand, which is recorded in both Matthew and Mark’s gospels. The Decapolis was primarily a gentile area, yet we see a great crowd, a great crowd of gentile people, seeking Jesus. According to St. Matthew, these people brought to Jesus, ***“the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute, and many others, and they put them at his feet, and he healed them.” (Matthew 15:30, ESV)*** However, St. Mark focuses our attention on one man in particular, ***“a man who was deaf and had a speech impediment.”*** The people had heard of our Lord’s compassion for others; and friends of the deaf and speech impaired man brought him to *Christ, our Compassionate Savior*, ***“and they begged him to lay his hand on him.” (Mark 7:32, ESV)*** What a loving thing to do.

Indeed, there is no greater love than to bring a friend to Jesus. It’s not a difficult thing to do, but many who call themselves followers of Christ seem to think it is. Truth is, it only requires that you have a friend who you know needs Jesus, and that you know where Jesus is, where He promises to be, with His Church to the end of time. The friends of the deaf and speech impaired man knew that their friend was incapable of helping himself, and they also knew where Jesus was. Moreover, they believed that Jesus could and would heal him. Thus, as true friends, they bring him to the one source that can resolve his impediment, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

I’m sure you have friends that suffer from all sorts of spiritual problems, problems which neither they nor you can fix. Not just problems of sin, but the problem of suffering from pseudo-Christianity, of the lack of understanding that faith comes from hearing the Gospel and it is not associated with improving one’s self-esteem, or with subjective happiness, or getting along with others. Those friends who suffer from believing that God accepts those who the world considers *good* to enter heaven after death. Or maybe your friend suffers from the problem of worshipping at the culture’s front door instead of in the church sitting in the Nave, who doesn’t know the Christianity of Scripture, who is clueless to the truth that Christianity teaches repentance, self-sacrifice, purity of heart, and the Way of the Cross as the pathway to God instead of the culture’s prescription, of follow your own heart and the world will love you. If you do have friends like these, then by the grace of God you also know the One who can fix their problems, and that One is *Christ, our Compassionate Savior*. You know that He is both willing and able to provide the help your friend needs. St. John reminds us, ***“Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.” (John 15:13, ESV)*** Thus, guided by the Holy Spirit, by faith in the healing power of Christ and out of pure Christian love, do as the friends of the deaf and speech impaired man did, bring your friend(s) to the greatest friend of mankind, *Christ, our Compassionate Savior*, who laid down His life as a healing elixir for all mankind and He will willingly heal your friend.

St. Mark tells us that after the deaf and speech impaired man's friends brought him to Jesus, Jesus took, ***"him aside from the crowd privately, he put his fingers into his ears, and after spitting touched his tongue."*** (Mark 7:33, ESV) Jesus separates the man from the crowd, taking him to Himself, withdrawing so that what He does, He does privately. This was not an uncommon occurrence in the miraculous healings of Jesus. He did the same when He healed the blind man in Bethsaida, ***"he took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village,"*** (Mark 8:23, ESV) Truth is, if we are to secure help from Jesus, then He must take us apart from the people, from the din and the noise of the world. He must set us apart from bad company that He may speak His Word of Gospel into our hearts so we may be healed from the sin which so disables us, that we may live a godly life,

The man's friends wanted Jesus to lay hands on him, but instead our Lord put His fingers in his ears and spitting He touched his tongue. Now these are not magical incantations, but by these means Jesus is communicating with the deaf and speech impaired man through sign language. The man is alone with Jesus, removed from the distraction of the crowd; thus, he can focus on what Jesus is doing. His eyes watch Jesus, and he understands that Jesus has taken him aside for a special purpose and that Jesus is about to do something miraculous for him. Thus, he is riveted on every move that Jesus makes.

First the ears that cannot hear and then the tongue which cannot speak intelligibly. Every move that Jesus makes informs the man that Jesus wants him to center his attention on his ears, his mouth, and his tongue: Jesus is intending to correct his impediment. This action by Jesus reminds us of what the prophet Isaiah said, ***"Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy"*** (Isaiah 35:5-6 ESV). St. Mark tells us that Jesus, ***"looking up to heaven . . . sighed and said to him, "Ephphatha," that is, "Be opened."***" (Mark 7:34, ESV)

The man watches every move the Lord makes. He sees Him look toward heaven and sigh, and he grasps the idea that the help Jesus is bringing, is coming from heaven. Our Lord sighs because He knows once the man's ears are opened so he can hear, he will be able to hear more than the Word of God, he will also be able to hear the evil tongues of those who persecute the church. He'll be able to hear false doctrine and the lies of Satan which have one purpose, to lead men away from God's Word. We're reminded of what St. Paul said, ***"For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions,"*** (2 Timothy 4:3, ESV) The sigh of Jesus is like a prayer, praying that this man ears will reject the word of the world and Satan, receiving only the Word of God.

Having looked to heaven, and saying, ***"Ephphatha," . . . "Be opened."*** (Mark 7:34, ESV) St. Mark tells us, ***"And his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly."*** (Mark 7:35, ESV)

Jesus wills that the man's ears be opened, His Word performs His will. But more than the ears are opened, the tongue is also loosened that the man may now speak so that others can understand him. The Word of Jesus has penetrated the ears of this man so that he heard its almighty sound. By His Word, *Christ, our Compassionate Savior* healed this deaf and speech impaired man.

There was a time when we, too, were deaf and mute, unable to hear or speak God's Word, a time when our Lord Jesus took us aside, bringing us to the Baptismal font where we could be touched by Christ, having the sign of Christ placed on us. As part of our Baptism, the pastor,

pronouncing the words of Invocation, made the sign of the cross upon our forehead and our heart, touching us and marking us as one redeemed by Christ Jesus. Our gracious and merciful God by His grace opened our ears and loosed our tongues that we may hear and speak, confessing God's Word. He opened our ears and our hearts to hear the word of the Gospel. But many are found today who, fulfilling the prophecy of St. Paul, listen to false teachers, or lying preachers and eagerly run to them with corrupted ears, gladly accepting the lies while rejecting the truth of God's Word. Thus, we pray, Lord Jesus, keep us from chasing after the lies of men while cleaving solely to Your Word. You have opened our ears and our hearts, You have trained our tongues to speak Your truth, to confess Your name to a world dying of sin, and to confess our own sins asking also for Your forgiveness. Help us throughout our days to use the gifts You have given us: open ears to hear Your Word and loosened tongues of a disciple to speak Your Word.

Thus, we see in this miracle the perfect illustration of how you and I are brought to faith by hearing the word of the Gospel (Rom. 10:17). Christ speaks His Gospel message, and the Holy Spirit opens our ears that we may hear, He conditions our heart to receive the blessed message of the forgiveness of sins in the name of Christ Jesus, and He enables our will to be in sync with His that we may proclaim with enlightened tongues the blessings of being a child of God. Jesus speaks, the problem is solved.

St. Mark tells us that after our Lord had healed the man, He, ***“charged them to tell no one. But the more he charged them, the more zealously they proclaimed it. And they were astonished beyond measure, saying, “He has done all things well. He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak.”*** (Mark 7:36–37, ESV) St. Matthew says much the same thing after Jesus had healed many in the crowd, writing, ***“when they saw the mute speaking, the crippled healthy, the lame walking, and the blind seeing . . . they glorified the God of Israel.”*** (Matthew 15:31, ESV) Gentiles glorifying the God of Israel, glorifying *Christ, our Compassionate Savior* for His miraculous healings. You, too, have witnessed many such healings, and you, too, should be going into the world proclaiming the miraculous healing that our Savior performs on those who are dead in their sins and trespasses. Literally raising them from the spiritually dead, opening the ears of the children of wrath that they may hear the life-giving message of the Gospel while loosening their tongues to proclaim the glories of His name and the Good News of salvation in Christ Jesus.

Wouldn't it be wonderful to hear others today glorifying Christ for His healing them from sin, death, and the devil? Wouldn't it be wonderful to listen to the blessed tongues of God's children proclaiming and glorifying His name? Undoubtedly, all of us answer yes! But how are we to hear their confession unless we bring those who need our Lord's healing power to church? How are those who are lost in sin, who are captive to the world, and whose future lies only in the horrors of hell to be healed unless someone brings them to church? St. Paul says, ***“For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” 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 10:13–14, ESV) How are they to know *Christ, our Compassionate Savior*, unless they hear the preaching of the Gospel, unless they are brought to the preacher of the Gospel? Again, St. Paul says, ***“faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.”*** (Romans 10:17, ESV)

Jesus healed the deaf and speech impaired man by His Word, opening his ears and losing his tongue that he may hear the Word of the Gospel, that he may take it into his ears, and into his heart, that is the word of faith, which he can now confess with his mouth. Confessing that Jesus is Lord, believing in his heart that God raised Jesus from the dead that he could be saved. (Romans 10:8-9). Therefore, bring your friend who needs salvation, bring your friends who needs Jesus to where Jesus is, His church, here at Grace that their ears may be opened and their

tongues loosed that they may proclaim Jesus as Lord, proclaiming Him as *Christ, our Compassionate Savior* who saves both body and soul. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

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