

Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost – September, 2015
Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church

Pastor Charles Heup

Mark 7:31-37

Then Jesus left the vicinity of Tyre and went through Sidon, down to the Sea of Galilee and into the region of the Decapolis. 32) There some people brought to him a man who was deaf and could hardly talk, and they begged Jesus to place his hand on him. 33) After he took him aside, away from the crowd, Jesus put his fingers into the man's ears. Then he spit and touched the man's tongue. 34) He looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him, "Ephphatha!" which means "Be opened!"). 35) At this, the man's ears were opened, his tongue was loosened and he began to speak plainly. 36) Jesus commanded them not to tell anyone. But the more he did so, the more they kept talking about it. 37) People were overwhelmed with amazement. "He has done everything well," they said. "He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak."

"Ephphatha!"

Can you imagine what your life would be like if you couldn't hear or speak? Many of us know someone who is at least partially deaf and how difficult it is for them. What if you couldn't speak? Perhaps you have known someone who was mute or unable to speak. I've known both deaf and mute people and I've always been amazed at how these individuals have found ways to cope with their disabilities. However, no matter how skilled they become in overcoming their handicap – they would give just about anything to be able to experience a cure. In today's Gospel reading, we hear about a man that was deaf and could hardly talk. We also hear how Jesus used his power to open the man's ears and tongue.

Theme: Jesus Still Says “Ephphatha: Be Opened

1. He opens our ears to hear
2. He opens our lips to declare his praise

This deaf-mute's story is also our story. There was a time when we could not spiritually hear nor speak. Then Jesus used his power to open our ears and our lips.

Mark tells us that Jesus was returning to the region of the Decapolis or Ten Cities. Jesus had just come from Tyre and Sidon, two seaport cities on the Mediterranean Sea just north and west of Israel. Jesus traveled southeast to the Sea of Galilee and into the area of the Decapolis or Ten Cities. He had been there once before. That time Jesus drove a legion of demons out of a man. When the demons entered a herd of pigs and caused them to run over a cliff into the Sea of Galilee, the people asked him to leave. The man, however, went and told everyone in Decapolis what Jesus had done for him.

Because the people knew who Jesus was and what kind of power he possessed, they came to him for healing. Many people came to Jesus as he entered the Ten Cities. Mark tells us about one particular man who was deaf and could hardly talk. The people begged Jesus to place his hands on the man. They thought that if Jesus just touched the man, he would be healed.

Jesus didn't come to earth to be a magic show, but he did want to help the man. Jesus intended to heal this man with his own personal touch. So Jesus took the man off to the side and away from the crowd. **After he took him aside, away from the crowd, Jesus put his fingers into the man's ears. Then he spit and touched the man's tongue. 34) He looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him, "Ephphatha!" which**

means "Be opened!"). 35) **At this, the man's ears were opened, his tongue was loosened and he began to speak plainly.**

Jesus healed this man with a personal touch. He didn't heal him with the wave of his hand and a magic potion. He spoke to the man privately in a way he could understand. He physically touched him in his ears and on his tongue. After looking to heaven to give honor to his heavenly Father, Jesus spoke his all-powerful word to the man. Jesus' word healed this man.

Spiritually, we are all born deaf and mute...because of sin. Born in a sinful condition we inherit from our parents, living in our own sin from infancy, we can't really hear God's word. We're not ready to believe anything that doesn't make sense. It doesn't make sense that one man's death paid for the sins of the world. It doesn't make sense that a man rose from the dead. It doesn't make sense that we don't have to earn our own salvation by living a good life.

What's worse is that we not only aren't inclined to hear God's word, but we gladly listen to everyone else's words. Ahab, king of Israel, is a classic example of this. He asked the prophets to tell him if he would be victorious attacking an enemy city. All the false prophets told him what he wanted to hear, "Yes, the Lord will give you the victory." Only one prophet said NO, the true prophet. Ahab hated the true prophet because that wasn't the answer he wanted. We do that all the time. We believe what God says as long as God agrees with what we think. We often don't stop to ask God to tell us his truth. Instead we form our own opinions or we ask others for their opinion hoping to find someone who agrees with our way of thinking. When the Bible talks about sin or money or the roles of women or homosexuality or sexual relationships before and/or outside of marriage and people don't agree, they say it's old fashioned; that doesn't apply anymore. And maybe there's a part of us that wants to go along with that kind of thinking. There are times when we can't hear, or don't want to hear God's word.

Then Jesus steps in to heal us with his personal touch. He pulls us aside from the crowd to speak to us in personal devotions or sermons or Bible studies. He asks us to just listen to his word for a bit. He has two messages. First, he is God. We do not have the right, authority or power to question him. We do not have the ability to make our word greater than his. He condemns us and tells us that if we continue to listen only to ourselves or the devil or the world, we'll suffer forever in hell. His word overcomes our deaf ears and hearts – convicting us of our sin and leading us to believe in him.

Then Jesus speaks his healing message, Ephphatha - Be opened! He tells us that he is our Savior. In our place, he always listened perfectly to the word of his Father in heaven. He died on the cross to take away our sins of rejecting his Father's word. He has forgiven us. That good news of forgiveness opens our ears. Suddenly we hear Jesus speaking to us and he becomes the only one we want to hear.

Jesus' word opens our ears but he does more than just speak to us. He again pulls us aside to heal us with personal touch. He touches us with word and water in baptism. He puts his arms around us and makes us a child in his family. He promises to wash away our sins and bring us home to heaven. As we get older, he also touches us with word in bread and wine. He lets us touch, taste, and smell the forgiveness he won for us when he gave his body and blood on the cross. Jesus doesn't open our ears with a wave of his hand and a magic potion. He opens our ears with his word and personal touch. He opens our ears to hear the right words, his words.

Jesus also opens our lips to declare his praise.

After Jesus healed the deaf and mute man, he told everyone something that probably surprises us. **Jesus commanded them not to tell anyone.** Even though Jesus had healed the deaf-mute man away from the crowd, they knew what happened because they heard their friend speaking plainly and correctly, maybe for the first time. The people were ecstatic, and even thankful. However, Jesus didn't want them to tell anyone. Why not?

There are a few reasons Jesus probably commanded the people to say nothing. First, Jesus knew that the more popular he became, the more his enemies would want to get rid of him. The Pharisees and teachers of the law were already beginning to plot against Jesus to kill him. But it wasn't time for Jesus' death yet. So, he didn't want to create a big buzz. Secondly, Jesus didn't want people coming to him for just physical healing. It's like the crowd that followed Jesus after he fed the 5000. They only wanted more food. Many of the people in the Decapolis came to Jesus for physical healing. But Jesus wanted to heal their souls more than their bodies. He wanted them to listen to his Word and believe that he was the promised Messiah-Savior. Finally, Jesus didn't want testimony from false witnesses. Because many in the crowd probably didn't believe in Jesus as the Messiah, he didn't want them to be the ones telling everyone else about him. He reserved that privilege for believers.

The people didn't listen to Jesus. The more he told them not to tell others, **the more they kept talking about it.** 37) **People were overwhelmed with amazement. "He has done everything well," they said. "He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak."** Hopefully, some of the people who heard about this believed in Jesus as their Savior and didn't just look at him as someone who could heal them physically. Scripture doesn't tell us whether the man who was healed or anyone else who heard about it became believers. What it does tell us is that everyone, absolutely everyone, was completely amazed. It's actually kind of sad, isn't it? Sad that all these unbelievers were so excited about Jesus that they couldn't keep news of him to themselves while so many believers say nothing.

We are the believers and Jesus has given us the opposite command. He gives us every reason to share his praises with others and even commands us to do so! He has asked us to go out into all the world and preach the good news of salvation (Mark 16:15). Jesus wants us to tell others of the miraculous things he has done. He wants us to tell them how he personally touched our lives, forgave our sins and offered us eternal life. He wants us to tell them that he is also their Savior, the Savior of the world. He wants us to speak his word to them. We say nothing. We're afraid of hurting feelings, breaking relationships or bothering people with their eternal life. It's just easier to stay quiet. Oh, we don't have any trouble telling them what WE think, but it's a lot harder to speak GOD'S truth. We'll talk about our jobs, families, cars and houses frequently, but how often do we talk about forgiveness and heaven?

Jesus steps in once again to heal us, this time to open our mouths to speak the right words. He pulls us off to the side to remind us again of what he's done for us. He's forgiven us for all the times we didn't see an opportunity to share his good news with others. He's forgiven us for all the times we saw the chance but just didn't have the courage to speak up. He's even forgiven us for all the times we spoke our word instead of his word. With that forgiveness Jesus looks up to heaven with a sigh and says, Ephphatha - Be opened! And with that powerful word, Jesus loosens our tongues and gives us the ability to declare his praises.

Jesus sends his Holy Spirit to help us speak. The Holy Spirit gives us faith to recognize Jesus as our Savior and the Savior of the world. He motivates us and gives us the desire and excitement to share such good news with everyone we meet. He opens our eyes to see opportunities to introduce our relatives, friends, neighbors, co-workers and anyone else we meet to Jesus. He gives us the courage to speak, to speak the right words, his Word of forgiveness and salvation.

Ephphatha - Be opened! With these words Jesus healed a man who was deaf and could hardly talk. My guess is that that man never stopped hearing Jesus' words in his ear or speaking about Jesus his Savior with his tongue. Jesus has also spoken to us, Ephphatha - Be opened! He has opened our ears to hear his word and believe in him as our Savior. He has opened our mouths to share the good news with everyone we meet. Can you imagine what life would be like if you couldn't hear or speak God's word? Thank Jesus you don't have to. Amen.