

"Are you deaf?" Mark 7:31-37 Trinity 12 2023

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Some people might consider it a blessing to be deaf. Then I don't have to listen to anyone yelling at me. I can sleep better at night. I can just live in my own world. Maybe that's why some elderly people choose not to get hearing aids. They can tune everyone out. But then the only way people can communicate with you is if they shout at you. They become angry and irritated with you and you always ask, "What?!?" Being deaf is not fun, it's a challenge.

Back in Edmonton at the Seminary, I found myself in contact with an almost forgotten church - Cross of Christ Lutheran church for the deaf. I found myself moved by the plight of the congregation and by the mission of the founding pastor (who was still alive when I was in seminary but has since passed into glory). I brought my family to church there and spent several visits with the pastor. The pastor's wife ran the church, and she and her daughter spent time with me showing me how to integrate into the deaf world.

I soon found out that there is more to communicating with a deaf person than just learning sign language. This isn't the case for all deaf people, but many of them had many other struggles that came along with being deaf. It requires a lot of patience to deal with deaf people at times, and it's hard to gain their trust.

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Deaf people don't really have a choice about their hearing, but we do. We have our own selfish ways of being deaf to those around us and deaf to God too. You can have a husband and wife who are completely deaf to each other. They are so tuned in to social media or their own wants and needs that they don't even hear each other. We have a society of people that are tuned in to politics and sports that it becomes an obsession. Yet these same people have no ear tuned to what God has to say. It is a self-imposed deafness. Teenagers will be more than willing to listen to social influencers than they are to listen to what God has to say.

The deaf man couldn't speak clearly. We have our own ways of not speaking up too. Think about how easy it is to give someone a care emoji. Think of how easy it is to tell someone "I'm praying for you." But how often do we even do that? We keep our mouths shut because we don't want to get in an argument, or we don't want people to get angry at us. We even go so far as to support those who we know are making immoral decisions to be "loving." So we are, in a sense, worse than deaf people that can't speak, because we purposely choose not to use our own tongues where and when we could, or we should. We speak in vague ways when we should clearly speak the truth.

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But let's get back to today's actual deaf man. They brought a man to him who was deaf and had a speech impediment. They pleaded with Jesus to place his hand on him. What a beautiful thing! Such a simple solution.

The people of Decapolis, in a sense, told Jesus how to do His job. "Here, just put your hand on him and he will be good to go." They wanted a quick and easy fix. But Jesus isn't here just to be a quick fix so that we can move on to the next project. See how Jesus alleviates the man of his fears. He's so personal with the man. He wants to involve this man in the process, so He uses the only senses the man has. Jesus took him aside in private, away from the crowd. He put his fingers into the man's ears. Then he spit and touched the man's tongue.

That's kind of personal, isn't it? And then the Greek says that Jesus "hepsato" the man's tongue. It can mean touch, but it can also mean to grab hold of. Where did Jesus spit? Did He just spit on the ground, or did He spit into His fingers and then grab the man's tongue? We don't know. Isn't this a wonderful thing too to think about, from the aspect of God? God is willing to get His hands dirty to heal us, even if it means sticking His fingers in dirty ears. He isn't repulsed by us. He personally deals with this man in his weaknesses to heal him.

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What does this mean for us? Sometimes healing must be very personal, especially when we have spent some time trying to hide our sins and make excuses for them. He knows what your weaknesses are, and He wants to heal you. But if you live your life in fear of being exposed and if you approach God from a viewpoint of “Don’t touch me,” then He can have no part of you. Think of Peter. He didn’t want Jesus to get his hands dirty to wash his feet, and Jesus told Peter that He would have no part with Him then. No, that’s not how He rolls. He comes right up to us with our weaknesses, and He wants to get His hands dirty in order to heal us, placing His healing power right where we need it. He has to get His hands dirty in order to heal us.

God’s most beautiful gifts are physical and personal. Think of why Jesus became human, so that He could use His hands not only to touch our broken ears, but so those hands could be pierced with nails and crucified. He Himself used His mouth to tell us who He is, the Son of Man who came to seek and to save the lost. His mouth is beautiful. He speaks words of grace, mercy and forgiveness.

The Gospel continues, “After he looked up to heaven, he sighed and said, “Ephphatha!” (which means “Be opened!”) Immediately the man’s ears were opened, his tongue was set free, and he began to speak plainly.”

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I wish I could speak a simple word, a simple Ephphatha, and all of the diseases, problems and sicknesses would go away. But I'm not God. I don't know who needs what and when. But I do still have the Word of God to give you. I have the Lord's Supper. I have prayer that God can choose how to answer however best. I can use that, and I have to trust that God knows how to answer my prayers. I also must trust that these tools are powerful weapons to fight against the evils of this world.

We also have a responsibility now that God has opened our ears, to keep on listening, especially when Satan is so full of lies! There is no doubt, when God reveals it, what is right and what is wrong, what is good and what is evil. And the only way we can have such clarity is by a miracle of Jesus. We need it, and so do all the deaf people in this world, those who have been deafened by a world of noise.

Do we speak up in a society that has gone to the devil? In a world that is being racked by hurricanes and disease? In a world that says God's design for marriage is wrong? Has he done everything well? Yes! He has given us full forgiveness at the cross. He has given us hope in the resurrection. He has given us protection by His angels. He has given us direction in His Word. He has sent tornados and floods to wake people up! He has done everything well and He continues to do everything

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well. We may not be able to feel it or see it much of the time, but by faith we see how He has worked it time and time again.

Jesus has not commanded us to be quiet. There are many deaf people in this world who need to hear the truth. Imagine if we were as confident or forceful as these people were with their deaf friend? How many more people would be coming here wondering, "Who is this Jesus? What does He have to say?" What would happen if our tongues were set free from our own doubts and fear? God grant it! Amen.