

The Twelfth Sunday after Trinity Sunday
St. Mark 7:31-37
August 18th, 2024
Sts. Peter and Paul Ev. Lutheran Church, UAC
Simpsonville, SC
All Saints Ev. Lutheran Mission, UAC
Pawleys Island, SC
St. Bartholomew Ev. Lutheran Mission, UAC
Fort Myers, FL
Pastor Jerald Dulas

His Ears Were Opened

In Nomine Iesu!

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Sermon Text:

“And He took him aside from the multitude privately, and put His fingers into his ears, and He spat, and touched his tongue; and looking up to heaven, He sighed, and saith unto him, ‘Ephphatha,’ that is, ‘Be opened.’ And his ears were opened, and the bond of his tongue was loosed, and he spake plain.”

Prayer in Pulpit before Sermon:

O Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Who by Thy Almighty Word didst make the deaf to hear and the dumb to speak, we draw nigh unto Thee in all our bodily and spiritual needs, for there is none to help us save Thou alone; and we humbly beseech Thee, touch with Thy divine power our diseased members and our diseased hearts, open our ears to hear Thy Word, loose our tongues to speak righteousness, and fill our hearts with the power of Thy Holy Spirit that, beholding the wonders of Thy grace, we may confess Thy Name before men, and praise and glorify Thee, Who doest all things well, and Who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end. Amen.

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

My dear friends, the kingdom of the Christ is found only where the forgiveness, compassion, and love of our Lord + Jesus, the Christ can be found. Only where our Lord is opening up spiritually deaf ears, and loosing spiritual mute tongues can the kingdom of the Christ be found. It is not found where people give us a laundry list of things to do. It is not found where works are praised; where men imagine that by their holy lives, they can somehow please the Lord God. It is not found where men believe that they only have a few minor things wrong with them; that if they could only fix, or get rid of these things, then their lives would be righteous and pleasing to the Lord God. The kingdom of the Christ can only be found where poor, miserable sinners crushed by the weight of their sin; who find no remedy in themselves, find a remedy in the Lord + Jesus, and in Him alone.

We do not often hear from the Evangelist St. Mark in the Church’s year. Only four times are we presented with a Gospel reading from St. Mark; only seven times if we count festivals, ember days, and midweek Lenten readings. But today, the Evangelist St. Mark presents us with a healing text—a miracle of our Lord. This healing reveals to us that we can bring no good work with which we may prop ourselves up before the Lord. We cannot heal ourselves. We cannot remove sin and its consequences from our lives. It is purely by the grace and mercy—the compassion—of our Lord and Savior + Jesus, the Christ,

that we are healed and forgiven.

This deaf and mute man represents us in our sinful state. We are born spiritually deaf and mute. We are actually worse off than this man, for he can see, but we are born spiritually blind as well. We are conceived and born in sin. There is no good thing living in us. We bring nothing to the table of salvation. As was said in a sermon recently, “we are beggars.” We possess nothing of which we can make a bargain with the Lord. Nothing with which we can make a payment to the Lord for His grace and mercy. Even with this deaf and mute man, St. Mark tells us that he did not come of his own accord. “They” brought to Him this deaf man with an impediment in his speech. We are not told who “They” are. But I believe we can safely assume that it was people who knew the man and who cared for the man, because nowhere in this text (as we are told in other pericopes) that this was done to “test” the Lord. No, my dear friends, this Gospel reading from St. Mark is like another reading that we will get in a few weeks where the friends of a man sick with the palsy bring him to the Lord by removing the roof and letting him down in front of the Lord + Jesus.

Like that text in a few weeks, “They” bring this man afflicted with a hearing and speech impediment to the Lord because they care for and have compassion on this man. This is not only an example for us, but also reflects our very own hearts. For we also have compassion on our friends and neighbors. We desperately desire that they would be healed of the spiritual blindness, deafness, and muteness with which they were born. We desire that they also would receive the healing of their souls through the work and merits of the Christ. This is why we continue to invite and encourage our friends, family, co-workers, and neighbors to join us here in this place, so that they too may receive the hearing that leads to salvation of their souls.

For like us, everyone we know is also unable to save themselves by their holy living. Nobody receives points for being a good person with our Lord God. As the Prophet Isaiah states, even our good works are as filthy rags before the Lord God. We cannot please Him by our works. The kingdom of the Christ eludes us when we try to present ourselves as holy in and of ourselves apart from faith in the Lord + Jesus. We remain deaf and mute. We remain blind and unfeeling. No, everyone must be brought to the Lord + Jesus for healing.

We are brought to our Lord + Jesus by the work of the Holy Ghost in His holy Christian Church. Here in this place, we are brought by the work of the Holy Ghost through the means of grace to our Lord and Savior + Jesus, the Christ. For it is here where we meet the compassion, forgiveness, grace, and mercy of our Lord + Jesus. It is here in this place where we meet, and are brought into, the kingdom of the Christ.

And what does our Lord + Jesus do for us here in this place. He does the same thing that He does for this deaf man with an impediment in his speech. He takes us apart from the crowds and deals with us Himself. He takes us away from all those things which get in the way of His giving us His gifts, so that we may have His full attention. Our Lord removes all of the distractions that plague us—that prevent us from being healed. He draws us to Himself so He may have our full attention.

Apart from the crowds, our Lord + Jesus has the full attention of this deaf man with a speech impediment. Then He does some things that we may in our germophobic society consider gross and unsanitary. He puts His fingers in the man’s ears. Then He takes spittle from His own mouth and touches the man’s tongue. We may ask, “Why?” It is not as if the Lord + Jesus needed to do this. This is not some sort of magic formula for healing deafness and muteness. Our Lord + Jesus has proven already in countless readings in the holy Scriptures that He can heal with a word. In fact, He has shown that He does not even need to be present to heal a person. But here, He gets up close and personal with this deaf and mute man. Why? It is for the benefit of the deaf man.

It is as if our Lord + Jesus is telling this man exactly what his problem is. He sticks His finger in the man's ear as if to say, "You cannot hear, and I will make you hear again." He takes spit from His own mouth and touches the man's tongue, as if to say, "You have an impediment in your speech, this too will I heal." The Lord + Jesus, like a Great Physician, points out the man's troubles and tells him that He will heal him of his afflictions.

This is how the Lord + Jesus deals with us. He takes us away from the crowds, away from all those things that distract us from truly hearing Him, and then with the words of the Law, by the mouth of the preacher, He instructs us in what truly afflicts us. The Law shows us our sins. It shows us that we are poor, miserable sinners—we are beggars—who cannot save ourselves. The requirement of the Law is too heavy. We cannot remove our blindness, deafness, or muteness. We cannot change our unfeeling heart into a heart of compassion. We cannot turn our heart of stone into a heart of flesh. We are trapped in our condition. We are bound by our affliction.

The Lord + Jesus, through the preaching of the Law, points out our condition, and that we cannot heal ourselves by our own good works and rationalizations. He points out to us that He is the only One Who can heal us of our affliction. And then by the preaching of the Gospel, that through His fulfilling of the Law and His suffering and death in our place, He has won salvation for us. He puts His finger in our ear to say, "Listen to the Word of the Lord God." For in it is the kingdom of the Christ preached. His compassion, mercy, grace, and forgiveness are preached into our ears through the preaching of the Gospel. This Word, for many of us, was first spoken at our Holy Baptism, where our Lord + Jesus declared us to be His own. He placed His holy Name upon us, so that we bear that Name with us throughout our earthly lives. And we can remind ourselves each day as we arise, and each night as we lay down to sleep, and throughout the day, that we belong in the kingdom of the Christ whenever we make the sign of the holy cross; the sign into which we were baptized.

Our Lord + Jesus also touches our tongues by placing upon them His very Body and His very Blood under bread and wine. By this meal we remember and proclaim our Lord's death for the remission of our sins. But this remembrance of our Lord's death is not just a reminder of the historical event. We are not just remembering that our Lord + Jesus died some two thousand years ago. No, my dear friends, we are remembering and proclaiming by eating and drinking our Lord's Body and Blood in bread and wine, that our Lord's death won the forgiveness of sins for all mankind, and that in this eating and drinking we are actually receiving the remission of our sins. By this meal our Lord + Jesus is healing us of the impediment of sin with which we are afflicted.

Therefore, my dear friends, let us rejoice this day. For we have been brought to this place by the Holy Ghost to come before our Lord + Jesus to receive healing and faith. He has shown us our sins by the preaching of the Law, and He has healed our deafness and muteness by opening up our ears to hear His holy Word. His holy Word tells us all about His forgiveness, love, compassion, mercy, and grace. His holy Word tells us that He has brought us into His kingdom—the kingdom of the Christ. We dwell in His midst and with our Lord. And He continues to heal us and lead us into His eternal Kingdom in Heaven. For that is where our Lord truly desires us to be. He desires for us, and all mankind, to be with Him in Heaven, to dwell for all eternity with all the saints who have gone before us, and with all the angels who minister before the Lord.

We who have been healed by the Lord's grace and compassion through the faith implanted in us by His Word will be brought by His angels to dwell with Him and all the saints in His Kingdom—in the kingdom of the Christ. Here we get a foretaste of that Kingdom, whenever we gather together in the place to hear about what our Lord + Jesus has done for us poor, miserable beggars. He has gifted us with the healing of our souls, and cleansed us with His righteousness, so that we stand before Lord God draped in the works and merits of the Christ, and are fully healed of all of our afflictions. In the Name of our Lord + Jesus, the Christ. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit after Sermon:

Almighty God, be pleased to accompany Thy Word with Thy Holy Spirit and grant that Thy Word would increase faith in us; bring into the Way of Truth all such as have erred; turn the hearts of the unrepentant; and for sake of Thy Name grant succor to all heavy hearts and those who are heavy-laden, that they may through the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ be relieved and preserved so that they succumb not to the temptation of despair but rather that they gain the victory over the world, the flesh, and the devil; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end. Amen.

The Votum:

The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria!