

Mark 7:31–37
12th Sun. after Trinity
Kaiserslautern Ev. Luth. Ch.
August 27, 2023

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

Dearly bought hearers by the blood of Jesus Christ,

At the point in Mark’s Gospel where our Gospel lesson picks up, the people of the Decapolis, the ten Greek cities around the Sea of Galilee, had already heard the reports of what Jesus was able to accomplish. Two chapters earlier, in Mark 5, Jesus cast a Legion of demons out of a man and sent them into the pigs. The man then went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis region how much Jesus had done for him, and everyone marveled (Mark 5:20). The people of the region noticed Jesus was back in town, so they brought to Jesus a man who was both deaf and had a speech impediment. In this blind and mute man, we have a picture of fallen humanity in a state of sin and unbelief. Nobody can open ears and mouths but God alone; nobody can open the ears of faith and loosen the tongues of faith but God alone. Today we zealously confess Jesus with the people of the Decapolis, saying: “He has done all things well. He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak.”

Hearing and speaking are fundamental to human flourishing. Language is how we come to understand the world. Language is how we come to understand one another. Without the ability to hear and speak, it’s nearly impossible to understand our surroundings, who we are, or who others are. Language is what distinguishes man from beast. Actually, it’s having a soul and being created in the image of God that separates us from the animals, but language is certainly part of that. In the beginning, God said. All things were created in, by, and through the Word of God. And after God created man and woman in His own image, He blessed them and *spoke*

directly to them (Gen 1:28). Man was created by the Word of God to receive the Word of God. God then had Adam speak to the animals, giving each one of them a name. God speaks, man hears, and then speaks in response.

The fall into sin broke this communication. “Did God really say...?” the serpent asked Eve. The Devil calls God’s speech into question. Satan offers the eyes something that contradicts the spoken word of God. And so man fell into sin because He listened to other voices besides the voice of God in His Word. From that point on, all who are born in the natural way are born with eyes that do not truly see, ears that do not truly hear, and tongues that cannot confess. That’s how the prophets describe those who turn to false gods. The organs for communication are there. They just aren’t working correctly. Those who worship idols become like them: they can’t hear or speak according to God’s reality. All who are born under sin are born spiritually deaf to God’s Word. And those who cannot hear God’s Word also cannot speak it.

The people brought to Jesus a man who was deaf and had a speech impediment. This man literally could not hear and so his speech was affected as well. But Jesus could help. The people trusted in the reports they heard about this teacher, Jesus, and so they brought their friend to the source of all healing, and they begged Jesus to lay His hands on the man to open his ears and loosen his tongue.

Jesus took the man aside from the crowd privately, as our Lord will often do. He wants to communicate with the individual right now, not perform a stunt for the multitudes. Here Jesus shows us how tactile and down to earth He really is. The LORD of all creation, Jesus Christ, the Word of God made flesh, could simply say a word and heal this man. Yet He chooses to perform a kind of ceremony to show the physicality of our faith and life. Jesus put His fingers into the man’s ears. Then Jesus spat on his fingers and touched the mute man’s tongue. As the Lord God

formed the first man, Adam, out of the dust of the earth, so does Jesus re-form that which has been marred by sin and death. Jesus then breathes out life giving words: “Ephphatha,” that is, “be opened,” in the Aramaic language. Jesus speaks a word of creation: Let there be hearing, let there be speech. Be opened, mouth. Be loosened, tongue. And the man’s ears were opened to hear and his tongue was released to speak plainly.

Jesus continues healing us today in a tangible, down to earth way. He uses physical elements and the spoken word to come to us. In Holy Baptism, you are born again of water and the word. Baptism is not water only, it is water connected to the promise of God’s Word: “whoever believes and is baptized will be saved.” God saved you by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit. It’s literal water, along with God’s Word, washing over your body to recreate you by connecting you to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Everything He won for you in His death on the cross and resurrection from the dead—the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation—everything He’s done for you is given to you in the physical washing of Holy Baptism. That’s how tactile our LORD is when He deals with His flesh and blood creation.

In Martin Luther’s baptismal rite, used in the early years of the Lutheran Church, that Aramaic word “Ephphatha”--- “be opened,” finds a place. After reading Mark 10:13–16, where people were bringing children to Jesus to touch them, and Jesus says: “Let the little children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God, the pastor would put spit on his finger and touch the child’s nose and ears, saying, “Ephphatha, that is, Be thou opened. But thou, devil, flee; for God’s judgment cometh speedily” (AE 53:99) In Holy Baptism, the Holy Spirit opens your ears to hear and understand God’s Word, and He opens your mouth to proclaim God’s Word in prayer, praise, and thanksgiving.

In the Lord's Supper, Jesus comes to you with His true, physical body and blood in the true, physical bread and wine. You can taste the bread and smell the wine. You eat His body and drink His blood for the forgiveness of your sins. Eating and drinking are the greatest reminders of our physicality, that we are creatures of God, soul and body together, living in a physical world. Eating and drinking sustain us in this life. Eating and drinking the crucified and risen body and blood of Christ sustain us here in time unto life everlasting. When we eat and drink Christ's body and blood in the Lord's Supper, we are reminded that we are physical creatures created for life in a physical world, which one day will be transformed into the new heavens and the new earth. As our Lord rose from the dead bodily, so too, will you rise from the dead bodily, to live a physical existence in a very physical place. God did not make you to be a disembodied spirit. He made you a physical body which will one day be completely healed physically.

Finally, in the Holy Absolution, Jesus forgives you all your sins with the words of a physical, human voice. "I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit." Our Lord breathed on His disciples and said: "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld." As Jesus breathed on His disciples, so do His disciples breath His Word upon you, bringing you a word of peace in the forgiveness of sins. Jesus is the Word of God made flesh and He comes to you in the flesh, in physical ways that you can understand, grasp, and hold onto in Baptism, the Lord's Supper, and Holy Absolution.

The unbelieving world, however, cannot understand this message. Christianity is a foreign-language to the world. All they see is weakness—the foolishness of the cross and the foolishness of how ordinary God's ways can be. That our LORD comes to us in such simple, down-to-earth, tangible ways is not glorious enough for most. They want something spectacular.

It can be frustrating when you are excited about the beauty of Christianity and can explain it in the clearest terms possible, yet people seem to remain deaf and mute about the things of God. Your otherwise reasonable friends and family can reject the truths of Christianity outright. But then you understand it's not because they're stupid. The Devil casts a strong delusion over the unbelieving world and there's nothing you can do on your own to make someone see the light.

Only the LORD can open ears and mouths to hear and proclaim God's Word. As the people brought the deaf and mute man to Jesus for healing, you can bring your friends and family to Jesus in prayer, and you can bring Jesus in His Word to those around you, that He might open their ears to understand His Word and open their mouths to sing the Lord's praises. If the LORD could open your ears and mouth, He can open theirs as well.

Finally, Jesus does something unexpected. Rather than have His power proclaimed all over the place, He charged them to tell no one what just happened. But the more He charged the people, the more zealously they proclaimed it. Jesus knew His time to be handed over had not yet come. He still had more signs and miracles to accomplish and more to teach before He would be crucified for the sins of the world and raised again from the dead. To act prematurely would ruin the plan. But that was before the Resurrection. Afterwards, Jesus tells His disciples to proclaim the Gospel in all the world, indeed, in all creation! May you who have been touched by our LORD, who have had your ears unstopped and your tongue loosed, proclaim His work ever more zealously and plainly! Truly He has done all things well. He even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. We stand for the Offertory.