

273. Mark 7:31–37
Trinity XII
Kaiserslautern Ev. Luth. Ch.
August 18, 2024

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,

When people hear the word “orthodox,” they might first think of the Christians of Eastern Europe, the Russian Orthodox, the Greek Orthodox, the Serbian Orthodox, and so forth. The use of the word “Orthodox” in those cases is capitalized because the word is used as a proper noun, as a name. But the adjective “orthodox” with a lowercase “o” refers to any church that holds to the pure doctrine of God’s Word. Any church that teaches correctly is labeled “orthodox.” The word “orthodox” literally means “right praise.” The Greek word “orthos” means “straight,” as in the orthodontist who makes your teeth straight. And the word “doxa” means praise, as in “doxology,” praise God from whom all blessings flow! So orthodoxy means to praise God in the right way, to walk the straight and narrow path that leads to God. Correct praise flows from correct teaching, and correct teaching flows from correct praise. Those two aspects of the Christian life, doctrine and worship, are intertwined.

Another way to put this is in the words of an old axiom in the Christian Church you might be familiar with: *lex orandi, lex credendi*, “the law of praying is the law of believing.” What this means is that there’s a direct relationship between what we do liturgically and what we believe, between what we believe and what we do liturgically. Doctrine changes practice, but practice also changes doctrine. The two can be distinguished, though not separated. That’s why we make sure to use only doctrinally pure materials in our worship life, at church, at Bible Study,

and in the home. As you believe, so will you worship. And as you worship, so will you believe.

Lex orandi, lex credendi.

The saying *lex orandi, lex credendi* goes back to Prosper of Aquitaine, a disciple of St. Augustine. Prosper lived in the 5th century in what is today southern France. What's great about Prosper is that he was not an ordained pastor but a well-informed layman. As a layman who understood the Bible and the Church Fathers, Prosper is an example to all faithful laymen that theology is not only for pastors and professors; it's for all Christians. You don't have to be a pastor to be an expert in God's Word.

Prosper's principle of *lex orandi, lex credendi*, "the law of praying is the law of believing, can be seen clearly in ancient and modern heresies that have infected the church of God. Heresy, or false teaching, is often first detected in the liturgy, in the worship life of a congregation or church body. For example, the heretical Nestorians refused to call Mary the Mother of God. They could only bring themselves to call Mary the Mother of Christ, but in doing so, their confession of the faith betrayed a false view of the divine and human natures of Jesus Christ.

Another example would be the distribution formula in the Lord's Supper: "Take, eat, this is the Body of Christ." In churches of mixed Lutheran and Reformed confession, the distribution formula was changed to say: "Jesus *said*, "Take, eat, this is my Body." It sounds innocent enough, but this slight change was meant to allow individual congregants to believe whatever they wanted about the Lord's Supper.

A more recent example would be Lutheran adaptation of non-Lutheran worship styles. It might be presented as an innocent matter of taste, but if you worship like a Methodist, or a Baptist, or a Pentecostal, you're eventually going to start believing the errors of the Baptists, the

Methodists, or the Pentecostals. Their worship practices reflect, and inform, their beliefs. The Law of praying is the law of believing.

Lex orandi, lex credendi is an illustration of what we find in our Gospel text this morning, where Jesus miraculously opens the ears of a deaf man that he might hear God's Word. At the same time, Jesus looses the man's tongue that he might declare the mighty works of God. The ears and the tongue are connected. Certain distinctive features of this story illustrate how Jesus deals with us today as well. The first thing to notice is that this man is brought to Jesus: "And they brought to Him a man who was deaf and had a speech impediment, and they begged Him to lay His hands on him." These unnamed people had heard of all the miracles Jesus was working. They trusted Jesus could take care of every need, yet they didn't selfishly focus on their own needs to the neglect of others. Rather, they brought a man to Jesus who could not come to Jesus on his own.

All of us were brought to Jesus because on our own we are too weak. Most often this occurs by bringing our children to be baptized according to the promises of Jesus: "Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the Kingdom of God," and "whoever believes and is baptized will be saved." That's a promise for all people. And if you weren't literally brought to Jesus as a child through Baptism, you can be assured that many Christians were praying for your conversion to the faith. Christians regularly bring people to Jesus through their prayers for lapsed family members and friends and for unbelievers throughout the world. At the same time, Christians physically go out and seek the lost to bring them into the Church, to the place where Jesus is present in His Word, in His Sacraments, and where two or three are gathered in His name. We bring people to Jesus because they can't come on their own. God wants to work through us to lead these people to Him. People brought the deaf

and mute man to Jesus trusting that Jesus could help the man. That's our role as Christians, too. Bring people to Jesus, trusting that Jesus can help them.

The text says that the man brought to Jesus was "deaf and had a speech impediment." The man could neither hear nor speak properly, as often happens with deaf-mutes. Hearing loss in children leads to speech impediments later in life. If a baby doesn't hear certain sounds, that baby will grow up unable to vocalize those sounds. Hearing and speaking always go together. We can only speak what we hear. That's the number one rule of language acquisition. The man brought to Jesus could not hear properly, and therefore he could not speak properly. But those who brought this man to Jesus trusted in Jesus to heal the man. They begged Jesus to lay His hands on the deaf-mute to make him whole.

Jesus took the man aside from the crowd privately. He didn't want to make a huge spectacle because His time had not yet come. That's why afterwards Jesus charged them to tell no one what had happened. But the more zealously He charged them, the more zealously they proclaimed it. Those who saw the good things Jesus did couldn't help but speak about it. Their mouths overflowed with the rejoicing of their hearts when they beheld with their own eyes what Jesus could do. And indeed this is a message for the whole world, but in its proper time. At first Jesus wanted to keep it a private matter. So often, Jesus helps us in ways the crowds cannot understand. He comforts us in sorrow and affliction. He remains with us through the good and the bad. He gives us strength bit by bit to overcome the temptations and the stumbling blocks put in our path. The world doesn't have ears to hear the message of God's Word. It's a faint whisper that often seems drowned out by the meaningless noises and messages coming to us from every side. Jesus takes the man away privately and heals Him in a place of stillness. The deaf man's ears were opened in a quiet place, where the Word of God had an opportunity to penetrate.

To open the man's ears and loosen his tongue Jesus uses quite earthy ceremonies. He physically put His fingers in the man's ears and then put spit on the man's tongue. Here Jesus shows us that He not only heals with the spoken word; He also heals with the Word of God attached to physical elements. We are physical creatures and God became one of us in Jesus Christ. God became man. He's like us in every way, including physically, yet without sin. And our physical God loves to use physical means to heal His people. Of course, He could have simply spoken a word of healing, but in combining the Word with physical elements and with a physical ceremony, God comes down to our level. He does things in a way we can understand and experience with the five senses. Jesus comes to us in water and the word in Holy Baptism. He comes to us with his true Body in the bread and with His true Blood in the wine in the Lord's Supper for the forgiveness of sins, for our life and salvation. The Word of God comes to us in the word of man. The Word of God comes to us as a man, Jesus Christ. He comes to us in physical ways because we are physical.

Looking up to heaven, Jesus sighed, He breathed upon the man and said: "Ephphatha," the Aramaic phrase that means: "Be opened!" Ephphatha Lutheran Mission Society is an LCMS organization that brings the Gospel of Jesus Christ to deaf communities, where the Word of God is preached using sign language. There you see how physical words can be. Such outreach to the deaf shows that even today, Jesus opens the spiritual ears of people. Even those who can't hear physically are able to hear more than anyone else if they believe in Jesus. They hear with the ears of faith. Those who can't speak physically are able to speak more clearly with their lives spiritually than the eloquent blasphemers of God. "Ephphatha," "be opened," is about a transformation in hearing and speaking that comes with faith in Christ.

The phrase “Ephphatha” was also included in Luther’s baptismal rite of 1523. The rubric says “the priest shall lay his hand on the head of the child and pray the Our Father together with the sponsors kneeling. Then he shall take spittle with his finger, touch the right ear therewith and say: Ephphatha, that is, Be thou opened [Mark 7:34]. Then the nose and the left ear [and say]: But thou, devil, flee; for God’s judgment cometh speedily.” (AE 53:99). Luther basically continued using the same baptismal rite that had been passed on to him, which includes this understanding that there’s a connection between Jesus healing the deaf and Baptism. In Holy Baptism, you are given not only the eyes of faith to see things for what they really are. You are also given new ears, to hear God’s Word for what it is. Faith comes by hearing and hearing through the Word of Christ. But in order to hear, your ears must be opened. That’s what Jesus does for you.

He says: “Ephphatha,” “be opened,” and so the Word of God can enter your ears and flow through your ears to your heart and from your heart to your mouth as you proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you, because Jesus doesn’t just open your ears; He also looses you tongue. He gives you His clear Word so that you can speak clearly of the things of God. The language of God’s Word changes your heart and it changes how you speak. The faith created in your heart overflows in a true confession of Jesus Christ as LORD, which includes embracing the fullness of His counsel.

The text says that the man’s ears “were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly.” The word there for “spoke plainly” is “orthos.” The man spoke correctly. His speech was straight. It was measured according to God’s Word. His praise was orthodox. The LORD opened the man’s ears, changed his heart, and changed His speech. What before was mumbled became precise. The faith created in the man’s heart overflowed into orthodox worship, the

correct praise of God. That's what Jesus does for all Christians. He sends you preachers of God's Word. He opens your ears to hear God's Word, which then changes your heart, and comes out again in a clear, orthodox confession of the faith. As the Apostle Paul puts it: "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved" (Rom 10:8–10).

The LORD gives us His clear Word that we might speak His Word back to Him in prayer. What we believe is what we pray and what we pray is what we believe. *Lex orandi, lex credendi*. The LORD changes our hearts and our minds by opening our ears and speaking to us. We then respond to Him in worship. Praise be to God who in Jesus Christ our LORD opens our ears and releases our tongues that we might faithfully tell of His marvelous deeds with all the faithful here in time and there in eternity. 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 Creed.