

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Tenth Sunday after Trinity, August 4, 2013

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 65, 19:1, 324, 508, 54.

Lessons: Isaiah 35:4-7a, James 1:17-27, Mark 5:1-20. Matthew 15:21-31.

Sermon Text: Mark 7:31-37

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

We don't know how long Jesus' journey from Tyre to Decapolis took. Tyre is on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea north of Galilee and the Decapolis region is on the East side of the Jordan River, south of the Sea of Galilee. Jesus could have traveled anywhere from 60 to a hundred miles or more, most likely walking. But the evangelists concentrate on the importance of the Gospel as Jesus travels through the countryside. Jesus was teaching the people, performing miracles, and especially teaching his disciples

When Jesus came to this area, crowds gathered and, as you heard in our Gospel lesson, *"Great crowds came to him, bringing the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute and many others, and laid them at his feet; and he healed them."* (Matthew 15:30)

Jesus had previously been in this area only once, as recorded in the Gospels. On that occasion he had healed a man of an unclean spirit in a very spectacular way, as recorded in Mark 5. About this man we read "[Jesus] said, 'Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you.' So the man went away and began to tell in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him. And all the people were amazed." (Mark 5:19-20) So it was possibly because of that man telling people about Jesus that he now received such a great welcome in this area.

Jesus' reputation as a healer had spread far and wide. And he never turned anyone away without granting the needed healing. We know that Jesus also showed his concern for their spiritual welfare and spoke to them about the need for repentance and the salvation he had come to bring to the world.

Please listen today as

JESUS HEALS

- 1. He opens ears and opens a mouth to speak.**
- 2. People praise God for what Jesus has done.**
- 3. Are you hearing what you need to? Let Jesus open your ears and mouth.**

We must remember John's words about the purpose of the miracles of Jesus: *"Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."* (John 20:30-31)

The case of this man, who could not hear and could hardly talk was beyond the ability of any physician to heal or even to improve. He could not talk clearly, but then you perhaps have even experienced that someone who is deaf may have difficulty speaking. Even today, deaf people who have received intensive training in lip reading do not always pronounce words correctly.

They, his relatives or friends, brought to Jesus a man who was deaf and had a terrible speech impediment. He may have been able to make sounds and even indicate his wishes to people who watched him closely, but he could not speak clearly. It was a severe ailment, in which the extent of Satan's power is evident.

Since he was deaf and mute, he could neither easily understand anything Jesus wanted to communicate to him nor express himself readily. Jesus takes the man aside privately, and uses some exceptional sign language. Jesus makes him understand what he was about to do. Jesus placed his fingers in his ears which showed he would give him hearing. Jesus spit, perhaps to suggest that he would spit out the impediment which prevented him from speaking clearly and then touched his tongue, showing he would give him the ability to speak clearly. By looking up to heaven and sighing deeply Jesus showed the man that the cure he was bringing him was more than an ordinary man could perform. It came from God. Then Jesus spoke one word and the man was immediately and completely cured.

Martin Luther made this point: "this poor man is hurt in this manner that he can use neither tongue nor ears, like other people. Those are blows and thrusts of the accursed devil. Before the world it may seem, and everyone [may] be of the opinion, that they be natural ailments; for the world does not know the devil that he does so much harm, ... inflicts all manner of misfortune upon them, not only in the body, but also in the soul, {so} that they ... cannot attain to true joy. But we Christians should deem such defects and infirmities nothing else but blows of the devil; he causes such distress on earth and does damage wherever he can."

Mark gives details of this healing to let the healing sympathy and power of the Lord stand out all the more beautifully. We don't know exactly why Jesus withdrew the sick man from the crowd. Due to his malady, the poor man was cut off almost entirely from communication with his fellow-men and had to be taken by the hand. This act of Jesus, whom the man could see, got his attention, to make him pay attention more closely to everything that Jesus did with him. It was only through signs that Jesus could communicate with him. The Lord then put one finger of his right hand into one of the man's ears, and one of the left hand into the other. He next touched the tongue of the sick man.

Fingers in the ears and touching the tongue shows that all help must come from Jesus. And it comes through his Word which enters the ears after being spoken by the tongue!

Luther again offers a great commentary: "[Jesus] refers especially to these two members, ears and tongue; for the kingdom of Christ is based upon the Word, which cannot otherwise be grasped or understood but through these two members, ears and tongue, and it reigns only through the Word and faith in the hearts of men. The ears take hold of the Word, and the heart believes it; but the tongue speaks and confesses, as the heart believes. Therefore if the tongue and the ears are removed, there is no noticeable difference between the kingdom of Christ and the world...With us, thanks to God, the tongue has gotten so far that we speak plainly, for there are everywhere pious people that hear the Word of God with desire. But aside from this there is also great ingratitude and terrible contempt for the Word of God [in the world]... That is an indication that the Word of God is despised and that people are secretly hostile to it; as we see that things usually go: where the Word is openly persecuted, there it insists on being; but where it is free and in open use, there people do not want it."

After these preparatory acts Jesus looked up to heaven and sighed. He felt the deepest sympathy for the unfortunate sufferer. In Jesus' sighing, we can also realize that Jesus' works of healing involved a great mental strain for him. And at last He spoke the Aramaic word: Ephphatha, which Mark translates for his readers: Be opened.

The result is that this man's ears, the instruments of hearing, were opened, and were put into commission again, and the chains that bound his tongue were loosed. Although he could formerly merely make sounds, he could now speak plainly.

As we read that Aramaic word, "*Ephphatha! (which means, 'Be opened!')*", we hear the very syllables Jesus spoke.

"People were overwhelmed with amazement. 'He has done everything well,' they said. 'He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak.'"

The reaction of the crowd is our reaction too, as we through these words of Mark stand in the presence of him who can be nothing less than the Son of God. For only God can do what he did.

"At this, the man's ears were opened, his tongue was loosened and he began to speak plainly. Jesus commanded them not to tell anyone. But the more he did so, the more they kept talking about it. People were overwhelmed with amazement. 'He has done everything well,' they said. 'He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak.'"

At this time in his ministry, Jesus again tells the people not to tell others of the miracle. We can understand at least two reasons. He did not want to be drawn into a ministry of just healing the sick. And we realize that Jesus commanded the people not to tell anyone because the Jewish people of his day had a totally false, political idea of the coming Messiah. Christ made it clear that he had not come into this predominantly Gentile territory to organize a political insurrection. He had come to Earth to lay down his life as a payment for the sins of the world, including these Gentiles. He was determined to let nothing compromise the purpose for which he had come.

But the people did just the opposite: so much the more, a great deal, they proclaimed the miracle. For beyond all description they were astonished and overwhelmed, saying: "***He has done everything well.***"

Today the command not to tell anyone no longer applies. In fact this is one of the great miracles of our Lord which we are to proclaim so that others may hear of Jesus' great deeds and recognize him as the very Son of God who came to save all mankind from their sins.

Jesus opened the man's ears first, then his tongue. Once one hears the mighty works of Jesus Christ in earning one's salvation, we may and should tell others.

With Peter and John we rejoice in what Jesus has done for us and "***we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.***" (Acts 4:20) We will want to share the gospel we have heard when it strikes our hearts. For it must come through the ears – unless we read it ourselves – and then make its home in our hearts by the working of the Holy Spirit.

As we make application of this to our own lives, we must recognize and admit that by nature we are all spiritually deaf and dumb. If we are to get help from Jesus, he must take us apart from the people. He must speak his Ephphatha, that is, "Be healed" into our hearts so that we may be healed from the sins that torment us and cripple us.

As a conclusion, please hear what Luther has to say and encourage us: "Therefore let us remember, and take heed of, this miracle, and follow the example of the pious people that praise Christ the Lord here that He had made all things well, that He makes the deaf to hear and the dumb to speak. This He does forever within the Christian Church, by means of the Sacraments and through the public Word, that the ears of the deaf are opened, and that the dumb are made to speak. Through these means, and through nothing else, the Holy Spirit wants to perform His work in us. Mark that well and cling to it with greater diligence; for that is the nearest and surest way that our ears may be opened and our tongues loosed, and we be saved. May our dear Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, grant us this! " Amen.