

“Ear and Tongue”

St. Mark 7:31-37

August 30, 2020

SERMON 1931

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Our sermon text is from St. Mark 7:34, “Then, looking up to heaven, He sighed, and said to him, “Ephphatha,” that is, “Be opened.”

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

When that ancient serpent, the devil, lied and told Eve that she would not surely die, he hadn't told her the half of it. The effect of the fall upon all men has been disastrous. St. Paul tells us in Romans 8:22, “For we know that the whole creation groans and labors....” God's creation designed as the harmonious cradle of man's existence changed into a harsh and sometimes deadly test of man's limits. From the thorns and thistles which spring forth from the earth, to the wild animals which fight against him, to the natural disasters of hurricanes, flooding, volcanos, tornadoes, this world has become a hostile place for man's existence.

When the serpent lied and spoke of death, the physical and bodily infirmities which are part of the now lifelong process of death were surely included. Bodily organs do not always do what they are supposed to do. The heart doesn't pump. The liver doesn't clean the blood. The lungs don't receive oxygen. The hands ache with arthritis. The legs don't carry the weight. The body doesn't fight off disease. And in today's text the man's ears don't hear and his tongue can't communicate.

Man's intellect hasn't escaped the brunt force of the fall into sin. Although man retains the wonderful gift of human reason, his sin often weakens his natural powers so that man does not gain understanding. Without perfect knowledge and devoid of a right relationship with his God, man uses his human reason to fight against the truth. He sets up arguments against the knowledge of God. He is taken captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy. He turns aside to old wives' tales.

But finally and most importantly, the fall has caused man to have spiritual infirmities that will result in eternal death. Our sinful nature prevents a free will in spiritual matters. We are born dead in our trespasses and sins. We are unable to come to God. By nature we are unable to believe in God. Romans 5:12 says, “Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned—.”

In today's text, our Lord Jesus sighs and looks to heaven in order to show us that everything which we need for faith and life comes from the heavenly Father. Furthermore, all good things come through God's beloved Son, Jesus Christ. We see that our compassionate Lord desires to help us. Out of His graciousness, our heavenly Father sent His Son to crush the head of the serpent and restore what we had lost in the fall.

First and foremost, Jesus came to take away sins. John the Baptist saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). Although Jesus will repair and restore all creation, He desires to be known as the Savior from sin. The heavenly Father desired Him to be named, Jesus, which is translated, "One who saves." Our Lord began His ministry at His baptism. There Jesus took upon Himself the sins of the world and was covered with our iniquity. From that point, Jesus preached and taught as He made His way to die. Jesus suffered and died so that by His death, we would gain life. He would take the curse which we deserved, and we would receive the blessing which He acquired. In our baptism we are united with the Jesus, who united Himself with our humanity and bore our sin.

But there is more, much more. He desires to enlighten us with His gifts so that we have wisdom and understanding. We are not slaves who know nothing of our master's business. Our God forgives sin and then He enlightens us with His gifts. St. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12:1-2 Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be ignorant: You know that you were Gentiles, carried away to these dumb idols, however you were led." God does not leave us in our ignorance, but educates us so that we learn His ways. He sends our preachers to teach us the law and the gospel. They show us the great love which God has for us, and how He sent us His Son to undo the devil's work.

God gives us baptism to save and renew us. He gives us confession and absolution so that our sins can be cut off and their power over us broken. He gives us His Body and Blood so that we are filled and satisfied with good things. "Lord, may your body and your blood Be for my soul the highest good."

Furthermore, our Lord who created both our body and our soul, desires healing for both. God desires us to be physically healthy and spiritually sound. He directs us to pray for our daily bread, because He cares about our bodily existence. Repeatedly we see Jesus miraculously healing those with leprosy, paralysis, and sickness. Those who ask for mercy are always given restoration of bodily health. When there was a lack of food in the wilderness, our Lord provided bread before the famine could harm them. Our Lord is not unconcerned with our battle with the hostile world in which we live.

As man is both body and soul, there is often an interaction between the bodily and the spiritual. Bodily sickness might be an impediment to spiritual healing. There are those like this deaf and mute man for which their sickness gets in the way of hearing the Word of God and confessing the faith. Romans 10:17 says, "So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." In order that faith might come, earlier in Romans 10:14, it says, "How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?" Though God sends out preachers with His Word, this man cannot hear the Word, nor can he call on the Lord with his tongue. Jesus sighs at the physical and spiritual condition of the man. Then Jesus miraculously heals the physical that He might also bring the spiritual healing.

Our gracious Lord has many different ways of bringing the gift of faith through the hearing of the Word. It may not be by miraculous healing, but by providing assistance. Wheel chairs, wheel chair ramps, and physical therapy help us to regain our mobility and be able to attend divine service. Hearing aids, modern medicine and doctors can restore health or minimize the damage. Live streaming and recorded services and Bible

studies are not ideal, but they provide a means for those who cannot be physically present.

Another way which you may not have considered. Our Lord has provided **holy baptism** to create faith in infants and others who are not able to come to faith through the cognition of hearing the Word. In our Lord's great commission, He tells the church to baptize and teach in order to make disciples. For adults we teach first and then we baptize those adults into the Christian faith. For children, we baptize first and then teach them later. Parents bring their children to receive the Lord's gift.

2 Corinthians 3:4-5 says, "And we have such trust through Christ toward God. Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God..." We do indeed "have everything that we need for faith and life." All of our gifts of body and soul have come from the heavenly Father through Jesus Christ. Our God cares for the whole person, body and soul.

Finally, we are to use our gifts to please our Lord. Do not be like the crowd who disobey the Lord's word. The Lord told them not to speak of this healing, but they spread the news of this healing anyway. Due to their disobedience Jesus wasn't able to openly preach the gospel of salvation, but had to remain in the countryside due to the miracle seekers. In another place, Jesus mercifully provided bread for the five thousand lest they faint in the wilderness on the way back home. Nevertheless, there were people who decided that they must force Jesus to be their bread-king. Once again, due to their disobedience, Jesus was unable to do his work of preaching and needed to physically withdraw from them.

You have been given gifts. You have eyes and ears and all your members. Use them to receive God's gifts and serve your neighbor. You have your human reason. Use it to acquire wisdom and understanding. Do not be misled by hollow words nor use your knowledge to tear down your neighbor. You have been given physical means to protect yourself from natural disasters and harm. Use your blessings to help your neighbor.

Remember that you may be the assistance that the Lord provides in order to bring faith and salvation to others. In today's Epistle, St. Paul speaks of the Corinthian congregation as a letter or epistle. He says that God is going to use them. By their confession of Christ and acts of love, others will "read" them and come to faith. 2 Corinthians 3:2-3 You are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read by all men; 3clearly you are an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart.

Your children need to be baptized and taught. Your friends and relations need to hear the word. Those who are hurting need your assistance. Those who are in need, require your donations. You may be the one to bring someone to church, or push the wheelchair. Use your ears to hear the Word. Use your mouth to praise the Lord.