

Mark 7.31-37
12th Sunday after Trinity
19 August 2018
St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church, Topeka, Kansas

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Beloved in the Lord: grace be unto you and peace from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.
Amen.

How many ways could the Lord have achieved the same end results as He did—a deaf and mute man released from his deafness, a tongue unchained from its inability to speak.

Let us count the ways. He could have stood at a distance, gazed upon the poor man, and uttered His holy Word, ephphatha.

And it would have worked. He could have done it that way.

He could have remained in heaven, never touching human flesh. And from His high perch far away, simply decreed that on thus and such a day thus and such a man would have thus and such a thing happen to him.

And it would have worked. He could have done it that way.

For crying out loud, He could have never allowed the ravages of sin to affect this poor man, this crown of His creation. He could have undone curse and death and disease and sin with a nod from His almighty head at the very moment of the Fall.

And it would've worked. Because He's God, after all. The Lord of the universe. The master of the entire creation. He could've done it just like that.

But He didn't. Instead, this is what He did. In the fullness of time He didn't remain aloof from His fallen creation. He entered it. And He entered it in a big way. Not just by tip-toeing into the baby pool.

All the experience that you know in this life here, where the stain of sin brings only misery and death—that's exactly where the Lord Jesus went. And He made Himself part of it. He took it upon Himself. He wore—and still wears—the flesh of sinners. So that sinless He could be made to be sin for us that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. So that the misery and death that is ours, He might bear in our place.

And then, one day, in a real place, in the region of the Decapolis, that flesh and blood—that flesh and blood that knows not only with the mind but even by experience the misery of life and the sorrow of the death that by sin casts its ugly pall over His entire creation—the Lord Jesus with His flesh and blood ears heard the plea for mercy of this man's friends, who brought him before Him.

And then, in that flesh and blood assumed by the eternal Son of God, it was sound waves from a flesh and blood tongue and flesh and blood vocal chords. An audible Word. Ephphatha. Striking flesh and blood ear drums. And fingers and spit. A wet Willy from the Lord.

For this is what the Lord Jesus would teach us: that when He wants to work, He works by means. Specifically: When He wants to save, He does it in your flesh. For you. And when He wants to bring His life and salvation and rescue from sin and death and hell to you, He uses things—Word, water, bread, and wine.

Behold, your God!

Behold, a God who is as real and near as the air you breathe. Behold, a God whose antidote to sin is as real and tangible as the sins you sin. Behold, a God whose holiness in the flesh is as real as your own flesh-borne sinfulness.

And this is good for you. In fact, the Lord doesn't do this for Himself. He does it for you.

Because when He acts this way, He eliminates from your mind every speculation.

Is it so? Can it be? Is God really gracious to me? What do I need to do in order to know this is true?

Must I ascend to heaven to know His mind?

No. We have His mind. It is Christ!

Must I wonder whether the forgiveness of sins and salvation and life that He wants to give is meant for *me*?

No! For we have it tangibly. Poured over your heard in Holy Baptism. Laid on your tongue and lips in the Sacrament.

Is that sin—that sin that bothers me so much, that sin whose guilt I can't flee, the sin I can't believe I ever committed—is that sin, too, forgiven? Must I wonder?

No! For from your own pastor's flesh and blood lips. From your own pastor's flesh and blood vocal chords you've heard it. Haven't you? "I forgive you all of your sins in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ who has sent me to tell you this." Words just as certain on earth as they are in heaven.

And that, fellow-redeemed, is your certainty and surety. It's what the Lord gives to you. Just as surely as spit, fingers, and Word loosened tongue and opened ears, so surely do Word, water, bread, and wine do what the Lord gave them for. They forgive sins. They rescue your life from the maw of death. They snatch you from the jaws of your adversary, the devil. And they give you, right here and now, the everlasting life, the holiness, the salvation won by the blood of Jesus Christ on His holy Cross. Thanks and praise be to God!

That's exactly what happened with the man in the Decapolis. The Lord Jesus burst into his life and used means to save him. For he was a victim not only of physical deafness and physical difficulty of speech—he was a victim also of spiritual deafness and an inability to speak correctly about God. A victim of his own idle speculation.

Because all false doctrine about God—that is, everything said and thought and believed about God that is *untrue*—is nothing but...idle speculation. It's dealing with God and thinking about God in ways that God hasn't asked us to deal with and think about Him. More specifically, it's dealing with God apart from how He has revealed Himself in His flesh-and-blood Son Jesus Christ; and speculating about Him apart from His written and audible Word.

And for this we have the Fall into sin to blame. What led Eve to eat was nothing but false doctrine, sheer speculation—quite apart from God’s holy Word. And it was nothing but false doctrine, sheer speculation, that made Adam wonder, “What would actually happen if I didn’t stop her from eating?” It was dealing with God by coulds and woulds and mights. To use the language of the Gospel for today, it was not thinking, believing, or speaking “straight” and correctly (ὀρθῶς) about God.

And now, some 4,000 years later, the same God who walked in the cool of the Garden in the middle of the day to restore life to death-bound Adam and to sin-bound Eve to proclaim the Gospel of the woman’s Seed who crushes Satan’s head—now this God comes again. He’s always coming. To one of their billions of sons here in the region of the Decapolis. For afflicted with their sin, like his own first parents, he cannot speak correctly at all—much less about God. And like all of Eve and Adam’s children—even you—he’s a captive of his own speculations. For He does not know God in Christ. He does not know God as He reveals Himself in His holy Word. He’s a victim of his own false belief. A victim of his own ears closed to all words, never mind God’s Word. A victim of the crooked speech he’s fated to repeat to himself over and over and over again unless the Lord Jesus come to him and heal him.

Fellow-redeemed: such is your predicament, too. And such the grace of God in Christ. Like this man you didn’t come out of your mother’s womb singing the praises of the God who gave you life. You came out screaming bloody murder and rage at the God who gave you a living death. Like this man you could do nothing but repeat to yourself demonic lies—speculations and false doctrine—about this gracious God who had given you life and limb. For you knew Him not in Christ. And you knew Him apart from His Word.

But thanks and praise be to God! The Lord Jesus who gives hearing to the deaf, sight to the blind—He did the same for you! He put His words into your ears and heart so that you could speak straight. That’s exactly what happened at your Baptism. By the power of His almighty Word on the lips of your sponsors, just like the unnamed folks who brought this sorry man before Jesus, first the renunciation of the father of lies, Satan, the father of all speculations about God. And then...a loosed tongue. A heart and tongue attached to ears that hear that you have a gracious God and Father who created heaven and earth and gave you life. A heart and tongue informed by ears that hear of the Father who sent His Son into your flesh to heal and save and give life where there’s only death. A heart and tongue loosed by the Spirit of God to confess Jesus Christ as your very own Savior from sin and death as the water in His name is poured over your head.

That’s just what the Lord Jesus did for this man in the Decapolis, isn’t it? By His own Word and fingers and spit He gave the deaf mute hearing to hear His holy Word and a tongue to confess His name correctly—to confess Him as a saving God. As a God who heals all infirmity. As a God who comes into the flesh of sinners to bear their sin. As a God who in bearing their sin gives them life and salvation. And who in doing so has done all things well. Thanks and praise be to God alone! Amen.

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