

TRINITY 12

September 8, 2019

Old Test: Isaiah 29:17-24

Epistle: I Corinthians 3:4-11

Gospel: Mark 7:31-37

Standing...

Grace be unto you and peace from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.
Amen.

Our Gospel text for today recounts the history of Jesus healing the deaf mute—
a healing unlike any other.

Let us pray. These are Your words heavenly Father, sanctify us in the truth. Thy word is
truth. Amen.

Sitting

I know it's odd—call it an affliction of sorts.

But, I listen to about ten sermons every week.

To make matters worse they're all bad—the worser the better.

Because they end up as fodder for playing for Pr. Bruss
on the plucked chicken podcast.

Preachers all the time begin their sermons with,

"The Lord has laid this on my heart..."

Or, "I asked the Lord what to preach today, and this is what He told me."

Something to that effect. It's tragic.

These congregations are left to the whims of whatever
said pastor may have. But not you.

Early on,

the faithful developed a system called a lectionary.

The purpose of which is that in one calendar year
there are assigned readings for every single Sunday.

And within in the course of a 12-month span,
all of the major doctrines of the Christian faith can be covered.

Everything from Creation to the Fall,
to sin, death and burial of Christ
to the expansion of the Church

including how the world will end
with the new heavens and the new earth.

Then, you would do it again the next year.

And the next,

with all of the major doctrines covered every single year.

The goal of which is the whole council of God is covered.

And today is no different.

You're not left to my whims, my impulses or desires.

What I have been given to preach you've already heard—

Jesus' healing of the deaf mute.

From the start of Mark's Gospel, there has been trouble everywhere.

There was a leper,

A paralytic,

A man with a withered hand,

A woman who couldn't stop bleeding,

One little girl who drops dead,

Another little girl possessed by a demon,

and now, to a man who could neither speak, nor hear.

We don't know much more than that.

We don't know if he could care for himself,

or, if could he work...

We don't know his name or his age.

We simply know that he had trouble.

Yet, another example of how wrong things are in the world.

Jesus was travelling in the region of the Decapolis—the Ten Cities,
which was a land flowing with "stones"—that being unclean Gentiles.

This is the same area where Jesus exercised a legion of demons from a man,
casting them into a herd of pigs,
who then jump off a cliff into the sea.

You can visit that cliff today, by the way.

I wouldn't suggest you jump off of it like the pigs did,
but you can take a gander at it.

Well, since then, word has gotten around about this Jesus.

That He has power over demons!

Surely, He has power to heal this deaf, mute man.

So friends bring him to Jesus asking,
 "Please lay your hand on him and make him better."

Now, deafness is not a disease. It's not life threatening. You won't die from being deaf.
 But a world of silence is isolating, and our Lord has mercy upon him.
 He pulls the man aside privately, and then does something quite unique.

He sticks His fingers into the man's ears—

Pr. Bruss called it the best wet willie ever.

Jesus then spits, presumably on His fingers and pinches the man's tongue.

He then lifts His eyes to heaven, and sighs—or better yet, groans.

Now all of this is the prologue to the main event;
 for when Jesus speaks, that's when the miracle happens.

The word spoken to the man's ears is, "Eph/pha/tha!"

An Aramaic word meaning, "Be opened."

Have you seen those videos where they put hearing aids on a child,
 and he hears his mother speak to him for the first time?

Aghh—tears me up!

Well, in the same way, this was the first word
 this man had ever heard.

That's all it takes from Jesus. Just a word—a powerful, performative word—
 even to ears good as dead
 and to a tongue fit for the grave.

Those things do not hinder our Jesus.

For at His Word the man's ears open, and his tongue is released.

Don't call the speech therapist.

No need for rehab.

But it seems unusual, doesn't it?

Saliva, ears, touch, Word.

Why did our Lord go through all of the hassle if He could just make it happen
 instantaneously? We all know He could...

So, why the ritual?

Why the liturgy?

Why the element, the touch, the Word?

Well, because our Lord heals as He wishes to heal, and more times than not, He brings about a healing using the Word coupled with a physical element.

Luther found this account irresistible, in that it was taken up by the Church in ancient baptismal liturgies. Before entering the church, the pastor would take the candidate for baptism, baby or adult, touch his finger to his or her tongue and then to the candidate's ear. Luther's Order of Baptism from 1523, reads, "Then the priest shall take spittle with his finger, touch the right ear therewith and say: Eph/pha/tha, that is, 'Be thou opened.'" [Luther, American Edition, 53.99]

For you germaphobes, you wince but it's the great baptismal confession of the Church.

Because when you are born, you can't hear God's Word.

Those parents who say,

"Oh, we've decided to dedicate the child to God and not have them baptized...

We'll wait and let the child decide for them self. What fools!

Do the parents wait to let the child decide if they need their
diaper changed?

Do the parents wait to let the child decide if they need their teeth cleaned?

Do the parents wait to let the child decide when to start school?

"Hey, it's up to you..."

No—they don't. Because they are good parents.

And they want the best for their children.

And good parents take their children to holy baptism,

because they know it's where one is reborn by water and the Word...

because God promised.

It's where Jesus Eph/pha/thas them—

opening their ears and loosening their tongue.

These "embellishments" Jesus uses remind us of the mystery that God uses means—
physical elements to do His work.

For instance, God used the blood of the slaughtered lamb, spread over the doorposts, to save the children of Israel from the angel of death [Exodus 12].

He used Moses' rod, lifted over the water, to divide the Red Sea and make a path of dry ground for His Church fleeing Egypt [Exodus 14:16].

He used the bronze serpent, lifted up on a pole by Moses, to heal the people [Numbers 21:4-9] bitten by a serpent.

He used a coal, taken from the altar of incense, to purge Isaiah's sin [Isaiah 6:1-9].

And, He used the water of the humble Jordan River to wash away Naaman's leprosy [2 Kings 5:1-14].

This use of physical things is true in the New Testament as well, as Jesus uses spittle or mud or the hem of His garment to do the work of healing.

You'll recall in the book of the Acts, God uses Peter's shadow [Acts 5:15] and Paul's handkerchiefs and aprons to heal people [Acts 19:11,12] too.

This is how the Lord delivers His gifts,
through means, and it's no different today.

For many of you, it started at the holy font of baptism. That's the first place where wrongs were made right. There, Jesus came to you and splashed you with His forgiveness. He put His name on you, adopting you, blessing you, and giving you His Holy Spirit. And this of course continues as the Lord uses what is on the altar and as the Lord uses your Pastors.

Yet here is what I want you to grasp this morning: It's a major doctrine of Christianity... We are that deaf mute in Decapolis.

As children of Adam,
we're conceived and born hard of hearing and slow of speech.
We're deaf to God's Word; mute of prayer and praise.
We don't hear when God speaks.
Nor do we naturally have words of prayer and praise on our lips.
Our ears are blocked,
our tongues are tied.

Instead, what we hear is the noise which comes from within ourselves—and it's sad to say, but we prefer it. We prefer our words over God's. We like our words, our wisdom, our self-justifications, and all the ways we build ourselves up. Put another way, we prefer our own spiritual noise. Because, in our lost condition tongues know only how to revile God and to speak evil of His Word.

Yet, what does Jesus do?
He intrudes into our spiritual commotion—He interrupts the noise.

The Scripture says plainly, "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of Christ." Jesus cries, "Open up!" And those words—His words, create faith.

Moreover, He takes hold of our tied-up tongues,
which thereby release thanksgiving, confession, prayer and praise.

Beloved, my point is, if the Lord doesn't open our lips and loosen our tongues,
there will be no praise, nor any prayer to come out of us.

This previously mute man and his astonished friends...they are thrilled—exhilarated.

They can't contain themselves.

Yet Jesus says, "Don't tell anyone."

Why not?

Because Jesus does not want the man to talk with his new tongue
until he has listened with his new ears.

Talk with your new tongue after listening with your new ears.

And this is a good lesson for us: If we don't listen before we speak, then our good intentions get in the way. We will say things and do things from immaturity and inexperience.

This is a wonderful encouragement for daily Bible reading...

This is a wonderful encouragement for adult catechesis, that started this past Wed.

Jesus makes a disciple one time by baptism, and then teaching forever and ever, Amen.

And it is only listening and learning and treasuring up His Word before we talk about Him that we know the right things to say. This is how we grow, this is how we learn and then we speak—teaching others.

Well, the people marvel—they are astonished beyond measure saying,

"He has done all things well."

And when that is said, it's the absolute highpoint of Jesus' popularity in the book of Mark. Really—that's the pinnacle. And with that, He's going to set His eyes towards the cross and when He does popularity spirals into, "Crucify Him, Crucify Him!"

You know,

the physical healings Jesus performed during His life were only the beginnings,
the very slightest beginning of the great miracles and gifts He will give on
the Last Day in the resurrection.

I mean, this man whom Jesus restored,
 he became deaf and mute again when he died.
 Just as we all will when we die.
 It's true of all of Jesus' healing miracles,
 they only last for a short time.

So, what does this mean? It means that Jesus' healing miracles teach us about the greatest miracle of all: that God who became Man dies for you. And not just for those who seem to deserve it—for as you know, none do. But He dies for the whole world, every last one of us: for every deaf, every mute, every possessed, every sinfully rotten one of us.

He dies to free you from a much greater disability than a lack of hearing or speaking.
 He dies so that your guilt might be His.
 He dies to forgive the sin you keep falling back into:
 your constant drunkenness, your constant addictions,
 your constant anger, your constant selfishness,
 your constant doubts.

And, it's that forgiveness you receive...
 when He gives you His very body and His very blood—
 when He opens your lips so that you also may declare His praise,
 and He gives joy to your burdened soul.
 He gives life to your dying bodies.
 And one day, should you die before He returns.
 He will stand upon the earth
 and He will say the word that this deaf man heard.
 Eph/pha/tha!—that is, "Be opened..." You'll hear Him.
 And what will open is your grave.
 And you will stand with Him,
 physically upon a new earth under a new heaven.
 This is the hope you cling to.
 All because Jesus has died for you and forgives your sins.

Make no mistake beloved, "He has done all things well."

In the Holy Name of Jesus. Amen.

Standing: The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.