

Mark 7.31-37
12th Sunday after Trinity
30 August 2020
St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church, Topeka, Kansas

+ INI +

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

All of us have some disability or another—I don't wear glasses for looks. And if we don't, we will.

So which of them's the worst?

If you're blind you can't drive. If you've been stricken with polio you couldn't run to save your life. And if you're paralyzed, the very ability to do what two-year-old can do—walk, even feed yourself—is gone. Not even the basics.

But with every sympathy for those who are blind, stricken with polio, or paralyzed I say this:

How much greater the inability to hear? How much worse to be deaf!

With all those other things—blindness, polio, paralysis—you can't do what you need you to do.

But with deafness you can't do what *God Himself* needs you to do: hear. For faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of Christ. No hearing, no Christ. No hearing, no faith in Christ. No faith in Christ, no salvation. And to top it all off, because you can't hear straight you can't talk straight.

And so you can only imagine Jesus' deep, deep pity for this deaf man in the Decapolis. For Jesus Himself can stand right in front of you, but apart from hearing the Gospel—apart from hearing that for Jesus' sake your sins are forgiven, and that for Jesus' sake heaven is yours, and that for Jesus' sake God the Father looks on you with grace and pity and mercy—apart from hearing *that*, there is no faith. Not only was the deaf man deaf; he was condemned.

And so Jesus simply healed the man.

Now, look, certainly this healing demonstrated Jesus' divinity. No one but God Himself can heal, even when He does it through the hands and mouths of His prophets and apostles, like we read in the Scriptures. Only God Himself, the Creator, can heal the creature.

But take the point further. This isn't just a demonstration that Jesus is God. It's a demonstration that Jesus uses His "God-ness" to save. To say that Jesus is Lord is to say that He's one who redeems and rescues—and has the ability to do it.

What a truth that is! What comfort there is in that for you, a sinner! Jesus is the Lord of heaven and earth, and He uses His divinity to save sinners. That's exactly what we confess at the start of the Divine Service. I say: "Our help is in the name of the Lord." And you say: "**Who made heaven and earth.**" What relief! What joy! What a rescue!

But without Christ. Without the Word of Christ. Without faith—you're left to deal with your own sin, with your own death, with your own hell all by yourself. And there's nothing to be done.

That was the deaf man's predicament. No hearing, no Word of Christ. No Word of Christ, no Savior from sin and death.

What a sad thing it is, then, when those whose ears once were opened by Christ's word in their Baptism reject that word. When they come to the Lord's house and everything that's said and done penetrates mind and heart as much as a whisper enters the mind and heart of a deaf man. Worse yet, when they know that God's Word is proclaimed and refuse even to show up with the possibility of hearing it. And when they find convenient, even reasonable-sounding, excuses like, "We're in the middle of a pandemic."

If you've found yourself saying that, test that assertion. Subject it to scrutiny. If the pandemic hasn't kept you from the grocery store, card club, and sports venues. From your work, from traveling, from gathering with extended family—then see how you've made yourself to deaf to God's holy Word. And repent.

Of course, the other way around it seems like a good deal: more leisure time on Sunday morning.

But here's where it actually leaves you: it leaves you with no leisure at all but stuck on a hamster wheel in the endless, fruitless labor of handling your own sin, your own death, and your own hell on your own.

Give it a shot! Quickly you'll find that no word but that of the Lord who made heaven and earth can forgive sins.

Lie on your deathbed and with all your might struggle against taking your last breath. You'll soon realize that only Christ, who burst death's bonds, can burst the bonds of death over you.

And go ahead. Make your own case, like those goats on the Last Day. And you'll find that on the scales of justice all the good you've done can never tip the scales against your sin.

You see, your deafness is your worst inability. As it was this Decapolitan's.

That's why Jesus comes to your rescue, just as He did for this man who was deaf and whose speech was garbled, and says, Ephphatha. Be opened. He wants you to hear. He wants you to hear that all your sins are for His sake forgiven. That He's borne every one of your sins in His sacred body. Even your deafness to His Word. And put them to death. They have no hold over you. He wants you to hear that the death that you can't possibly in a million years overcome, He has. Already. By His own firstfruits resurrection. And where there are firstfruits, the rest of the harvest is to follow. And He wants you to hear that the hell that's your eternal sentence has already been vanquished by His descent there in victory. And that He's placed you in His kingdom, against which the gates of hell cannot prevail.

St. Paul says this: Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in Him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without a preacher? So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.

Now I don't want to be captain obvious here, but Mark pointedly notes that the deaf man wasn't only deaf, but his speech was garbled. It was impossible for him to call on the Lord's name and being saved. He was nothing more than a lost and condemned sinner, unable even raise himself to the Lord's attention by calling on Him, much less be saved.

But you see, that didn't matter to Jesus so very much.

Likewise you: No matter how lost and estranged from God you might be and feel, now Jesus comes to you in His Word. He forgives you all your sins. He opens your ears and loosens your tongue so that with this blind stammerer, you, too, might be saved.

God grant it to you all for Christ's sake.

Amen.

pax dei, etc.

jsb
sdg