

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

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

Amen.

The thoughts for the message this morning come from our Gospel reading, especially verses 32-35, “And they brought to [Jesus] a man who was deaf and had a speech impediment, and they begged him to lay his hand on him. ³³ And taking him aside from the crowd privately, he put his fingers into his ears, and after spitting touched his tongue. ³⁴ And looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, “Ephphatha,” that is, “Be opened.” ³⁵ And his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly” (Mark 7:32-35).

We pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Congregation is seated.

I don't know what ails you. For me it is my left knee, among other things. I'm not sure what physical ailments you deal with. But I'm pretty sure that you have something. Most of us do. All of us will eventually. That's the effect of living in a fallen creation. Our knees or our backs hurt. We have a hard time controlling our blood pressure or our blood sugars. We have allergies. They're bad at this time of year. There's something wrong, we don't feel right, but the doctors can't figure out what it is. Then there's the even bigger problems. Things like a bad heart or the doctor said it's cancer.

We all bear crosses when it comes to problems with our bodies. Some of us have a heavier cross to carry than others. But we all have crosses (or eventually will). As I said, that's the effect of sin in God's creation.

This is not to say that there is a direct one-to-one correspondence. This is a broad truth. Since we all are born sinners, things don't work right. They don't work as they should. The particulars of our situations vary, but the problem is the same.

Because we have this problem, we should turn our attention to our Gospel reading for this morning. We should cling to this Word of God because Jesus, in healing the man who was deaf and who had a speech impediment, says something to us.

It happened when Jesus was returning from a trip to the northwest, to Tyre and Sidon. He was now southeast of the Sea of Galilee. Some people brought a man who was deaf and had trouble speaking. They wanted Jesus to touch him. The touch of Jesus had proven to have healing power. There was the woman who had the discharge of blood. She simply went up to Jesus in a crowd and touch His robe and she was healed. And Jesus had healed many up by the Sea of Galilee by touching them. But this man's case was a severe one.

When this man was brought to Jesus, Jesus does receive him. Jesus takes him aside privately. He touches his ears, spits, and touches his tongue. Then Jesus looks up to heaven and says, "Ephphatha," an Aramaic word meaning "Be opened." And immediately the man's ears could hear, and his tongue was loosed. He could speak plainly. The man was healed.

This is a pretty straightforward and simple story. But one that should encourage us because in it, Jesus teaches us that He is stronger than our sicknesses. He is absolutely bigger than our ailments. Why look at how the crowd reacts. Mark tells us, "[T]hey were astonished beyond measure, saying, 'He has done all things well. He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak'" (Mark 7:37). While Jesus had healed others before, the reaction of the crowd tells us that this was a big deal.

And it still is. You see, as Jesus heals the man in our Gospel reading, He gives us the assurance of the victory over all of our physical ailments. Jesus is able to heal you. What good news!

This is something we need to be reminded of because in our world today, it's too easy for us to attribute somebody getting better to something other than the work of the Lord. People think they get better because they took the right medicine. Or they got enough rest. Too often we take the Lord out of the equation. But our Lord is at work doing the healing. Sometimes our Lord works through our bodies to fight off infections and diseases. After all, He is the one who created us and gave us these bodies. Other times He works through His blessings of doctors, nurses, and medicine to bring about healing. But the Lord is still healing people today.

And yet, as I said at the beginning of the sermon, we have our ailments. And some of us are eagerly awaiting the Lord's healing. Praying earnestly for that healing. Perhaps becoming impatient and starting to question if the Lord cares or is listening. Our Gospel reading reminds

us that Jesus does care. He is the Great Physician. He is ultimately the One we should turn to Him when it comes to our physical problems. And when He provides relief, we should offer prayers of thanksgiving. And when we are struggling, we ask and continue to ask for His mercy.

However, if the Lord doesn't answer our particular prayer in the way that we want we shouldn't think that means that God doesn't care or that He's powerless to help. God might just have other purposes for waiting to bring healing to us. As His Word says in Romans 8:28, "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28).

That's a passage that we Christians like to turn to when things don't go the way we want them to. However, that passage is one that points us to what happens at the very end. This passage points us to the completion of God's good purposes for us. We see this, because in the next verse, in Romans 8:29, the Apostle Paul writes about God glorifying people. You see, God's word in Romans 8 is about God working all things for the good of those who love Him – in the end.

And that's what we have to acknowledge about the victory Jesus shows us in our Gospel reading from Mark 7. That victory is given to us, not necessarily on this day, but on the Last Day. As the Apostle Paul declares in Philippians 3, "Our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body" (Philippians 3:20-21).

The victory of healing that Jesus provides will be seen in all of its' fullness on the Last Day. But even as we wait for that, the Lord gives us something right now. Today.

You see, you came to church with a sickness this morning. The sickness of sin had infected you this past week. Sin had racked your body. By sins of deed, the members of your body are infected. And by sins of word, your mouth and tongue are infected too. As for your mind, your thoughts, impure or greedy, not wholesome or pure, prove that the disease is even in your mind.

So, you come here because Jesus is the healer. You come here asking for the Lord's mercy. And just like Jesus had mercy on the man in Mark 7, He has mercy on you. He says, "I forgive you. You have been baptized into me and you are healed." And this forgiveness that Jesus offers you today is the assurance of a full healing that will come. This is what we mean when we confess that wherever there is forgiveness of sins there is also life and salvation. Forgiveness and life, abundant life, are tied together.

In the ancient church, they had an interesting way of demonstrating this when a person was baptized. You see, during the rite of baptism, the pastor first would take his fingers and touch the person's ears. The pastor would say the very word from our Gospel reading "Ephphatha," that is, "Be opened." This was the way that the people in the early church recognized that in Baptism Jesus offers forgiveness and healing, and healing of an eternal nature.

The two are very much connected. The spiritual blessings of baptism are tied to the physical blessings. What you receive at the Font is a healing that guarantees an even greater one to come.

So know dear Christian, the Lord offers you healing. This is what God gives you in your baptism. And you have it in His Supper. Because as you receive from the Lord's hand the very body and blood of Jesus Christ, you receive "the medicine of immortality."

"Ephphatha." "Be opened." Your ears have been opened to hear the Good News of Jesus. You've heard it today in the Jesus' healing of the deaf man. You've heard it in God's Word of forgiveness. In Christ, your sickness of sin has been removed by His cross. And in His empty tomb you have the assurance of your own resurrection to life everlasting. So dear Christian, sing the Lord's praises for what He has done. Today. In this week to come. And always. For Jesus is your Great Physician. Amen.

Congregation rises

Now the peace of Christ that passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus the Lord. Amen.