

Trinity 12  
Mark 7:31-37 (ESV)

“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.”

In the name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Introduction

1. Blessings to all of you, dear ones. I’m very glad to see the Lord has graciously sustained all of you through this blistering heat we’ve recently endured.
  - a. Perhaps I should also pray that we ourselves don’t suffer heat exhaustion and need you all to come visit us in the hospital.
2. We have in Mk. 7:31-37 a magnificent text appointed for us that shows in dazzling color and richness quite a bit about who Jesus is and what He’s come to do.
  - a. This, of course, is one of the great things about the lectionary—about the church in her wisdom appointing specific texts from Holy Scripture for each Sunday of the church year—texts which tell us very important things about Jesus, which we then confess with our mouths based on what we hear.
3. So, then, if someone were to ask you about what you hear in the account of Jesus healing the deaf-mute man, what would you say? What would you say about who Jesus is and what He’s come to do based on what you hear?

Main Body

1. If we play things out a bit, maybe, at first glance, it may come naturally for you to say:
  - a. that the detail about Jesus passing from the region of Tyre and Sidon to the Sea of Galilee and beyond into the region of the Decapolis is simply a factual description of where Jesus was going as He went about in His ministry.
  - b. That the people there bring Jesus a certain deaf-mute man and were begging Him to lay His hand on him. And for what reason?
    - i. Maybe you’d say it’s because they probably felt bad for the man because of his disabilities. He was on the fringes of society—marginalized and an outcast—therefore, if anyone deserved special treatment and attention, it was this man.
    - ii. Or, maybe you’d say instead that the people brought this man to Jesus because in spite of his inability to hear and his inability to speak rightly, the man had accomplished great things—and, therefore, if anyone had earned the right to have Jesus do something special for them, it was him.

- c. And so, Jesus, taking this man to Himself, put His fingers in the man's ears and touched his tongue to show how He'd heal the man. What He did was effectively a gesture.
  - d. And then Jesus looks into heaven and sighs, as if to say:
    - i. Would that society were more welcoming of people like you.
    - ii. Or, would that more people in society were more like you.
  - e. Thus, maybe what you ultimately hear and would say about Jesus based on this text is that He's:
    - i. the champion of the marginalized and the outcasts on the fringes of a cruel society that rejects them and He's come to take up the cause of the downtrodden. And so should we.
    - ii. Or, perhaps that Jesus is the champion of the rugged individual who perseveres in spite of adversity and all the odds stacked against him, and therefore that God delights in helping those who help themselves. And therefore that's what we should do.
2. But if these are the things you hear from this text, if these are the things you'd say about Who Jesus is and what He's come to do, then I beg your pardon, dear ones, but no! If I may be so bold, you've been unable to hear what the Scriptures are truly saying to you and therefore are unable to speak rightly, like the deaf-mute man in this text! And for all of you listening who knew better and could see right through these things, take heed lest you fall on account of pride.
- a. Because the truth is, the deaf-mute man is a theological image for everyone in the world who's unable to hear the truth of God's Word and is therefore unable to confess the one true faith in Jesus, the Son of God and Savior of mankind.
    - i. For the devil, the world, and our fallen, sinful nature all actively work against us and would lead us away from hearing the Word of God and confessing Christ as we should.
    - ii. And indeed as happy as the devil is to leave mankind mangled and deformed, physically unable to hear or speak, he's much more pleased to leave men spiritually deaf to the Word of God and incapable of confessing that Jesus Christ is Lord—for these things bring with them eternal consequences that will not be undone.
3. So what then is our Gospel text truly saying about Jesus?—about Who He is and what He's come to do? What should we hear and say?

- a. Well in the first place, the detail St. Mark includes about Jesus going from Tyre and Sidon to, or even into, the Sea of Galilee and beyond into the region of the Decapolis is anything but incidental.
  - i. Theologically, what the sea is understood to be is the place of uncontrollable chaos and destruction. It's the domain of the demons that cannot be controlled or restrained by any mere mortal, and all who are caught in this domain are completely helpless to deliver themselves from it.
  - ii. So if you have ears to hear what the Bible is saying, Jesus going to or into the Sea of Galilee and thus passing into the region of the Decapolis means Jesus is going directly into the place where the devil and his hordes hold court. He's going right into the place where their tyrannical power is unmatched and where they hold men captive to sin and death, and Jesus goes to triumph over them—to plunder their domain and to save—to steal men and women and children out of their clutches and bring them into the kingdom of God.
- b. And so when Christ is met with the deaf-mute man, there's absolutely nothing about him that merits or is deserving of something special from Jesus. The man is completely dependent on Jesus to do what he could never dream of doing. And so it is for all of us.
- c. Jesus takes the man aside from the crowd privately and puts His fingers into his ears and after spitting touches the man's tongue.
  - i. The Incarnate Word of God here sanctifies the man's ears and tongue and prepares them to be made new, to receive the life-giving Word preached into his ears and then to confess with his mouth the very same thing.
- d. And then, Jesus looks into heaven and sighs—or more literally groans—in an act of *sympatheia*. Jesus enters into this man's suffering and makes it His very own. Jesus enters into this man's deep, bitter lament over his body's brokenness, the brokenness of this life and all that is in it, and Jesus gives expression to this deep longing for healing, for restoration, for God to make right all that has gone so terribly wrong.
  - i. And in this groaning, dear ones, we get a glimpse of what our Lord Christ will do for all mankind on the cross—the loud groanings He sends up to heaven as He carries our afflictions and bears our burden of sin in His holy body—the ultimate act of sympathy with our fallen race.
  - ii. And there on the cross when Jesus breathes His last and gives over the Spirit in His death, He disarms the principalities and powers of darkness in

the heavenly places by making satisfaction for all our sins through His shed blood. He has redeemed us and sets us free from the bondage to sin, death, and the devil.

- iii. All of this is glimpsed in Christ's groaning before the deaf-mute man. And it's no surprise then to see Christ say to him, "Ephphatha"—be opened!
  - iv. Physically, the work of the devil was undone.
  - v. Not just what Christ did once upon a time, but what He's still doing through the church even today.
- e. All these things Jesus does for the deaf-mute man make for such a wonderful image of holy Baptism.
- i. Separation from the multitudes
  - ii. Pastor marking the candidate with his fingers
  - iii. Joining water with that which comes from Christ's mouth (His Word)
  - iv. We receive the holy Spirit and can hear and rightly speak the truth of God's Word, that Jesus is the Son of God Who comes to destroy the works of the devil—1 Jn. 3:8
  - v. Reflected in the baptismal liturgy of St. Ambrose all the way back in the 4<sup>th</sup> century
- f. Since even these Gentiles brought this deaf-mute man before Jesus, how much more ought we do the same for those who cannot hear and rightly confess God's Word?

To Christ be all the glory forever and ever.