

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

“And taking him aside from the crowd privately, he put his fingers into his ears, and after spitting touched his tongue. And looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, ‘Ephphatha,’ that is, ‘Be opened.’”

There are many extraordinary things in this Gospel reading today. Jesus works a miracle to be sure, that’s extraordinary by itself to heal a man. Another is who Jesus is as fully God and fully man. God himself touches this man and heals him. But in all this, Jesus shows mercy to his people. You hear in this Gospel reading of your Lord who show mercy and you see it’s all for you too.

St. Mark’s account of this healing starts off with an interesting detail, “[Jesus] returned from the region of Tyre and went through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis. And they brought to him a man who was deaf and had a speech impediment, and they begged him to lay his hand on him.” This is gentile country. The people in this area are ones who are, in general, not the people of Israel. We think about this same area with other readings such as the Canaanite woman who came to Jesus on behalf of her daughter. Here, in this reading people bring to Jesus a man who couldn’t hear and had speech issues. Yet, they knew they needed to bring to this man to Jesus. They knew Jesus is the one who shows mercy to his people.

Jesus came into this sinful world to redeem his creation. He knew full well what had happened in the fall into sin and the only real answer to it was for him to reconcile the world to Father. He had to justify his creation by his life lived according to God’s law and his death offered as a sacrifice to sin. Only then would there ever be any real healing and life. This is what Jesus knew, what he experienced as he walked this earth, and what he came to do and accomplish.

Jesus sees this man has compassion. He sees the consequences of sin and the state of this fallen world and shows mercy to this man. “And taking him aside from the crowd privately, he put his fingers into his ears, and after spitting touched his tongue. And looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, ‘Ephphatha,’ that is, ‘Be opened.’” A few other places in the Bible where this word for sighing is used are in Romans 8 and 2 Corinthians 5. In those instances, most often the word is translated as “groan” or “groaning.” It’s a word for what our bodies do as we live in this fallen world and yearn for the resurrection of the dead and the new creation. It’s rooted in a hope of what is to come as God has promised it will be on that day.

And, indeed, Jesus does show mercy. He shows mercy as only he can do. He exercises his power as God in the flesh and acts with the authority that given to him. Jesus worked a miracle and gave a glimpse into the life to come. Jesus exercises his power to heal and to save. There is no corruption, deceit, or selfishness in what does. Jesus acts out of grace and mercy. He restores what has been broken and tainted by sin. He heals and sets free those who were in bondage to sin and its consequences by his whole life, death, and resurrection. He preaches the truth which sets you free for he himself is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. He shows you mercy today even as he preaches to you.

Jesus shows you mercy and has worked a miracle for you. He knows your state. He knows what is rightly due this fallen world. He knows the assaults of the devil. He knows what sin has brought about and what it means to live in this world. Outside of Christ there are only, sin, darkness, and death. Jesus though, is the Righteous one. He is the Word made flesh. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning, and the end. Jesus said to Nicodemus in John 3, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

God has opened your ears and released your tongue. God shows you that you need to have God speak and act to bring you into his kingdom and make you a Christian. Romans 10 sums this up well when St. Paul by divine inspiration writes, “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 someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!’ But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, ‘Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?’ So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.”

Without God preaching to you and using his means of grace, you wouldn’t believe in Jesus. You need God to give you faith. That’s something so obvious, perhaps, yet something easily taken for granted. The gift of faith and being able to speak the things of God is nothing short of a miracle. It’s not really any different than Jesus opening the eyes of man who is physically blind. The blindness, stubbornness, and ignorance of our sin is such that we can’t see God or come to him on our own.

God’s mercy and grace extend to the fact that he takes people, us, who can’t believe in him or come to him and are turned against him because of sin and gives us faith to trust in him and what he has done for us. If that isn’t miraculous, I don’t know what is yet this what he does and he does through preaching Christ to sinners. That’s a wonderful thing yet regarded as foolishness to the world.

God is the one who creates faith completely on his own. It may be easy for those who have faith to believe God would save us by his grace alone and without anything we have done or can do but then when it comes to faith, we want to add a “yeah but” to it. We want to somehow claim ownership that we decided, responded with a decision, or somehow play some part however small or miniscule in faith. You can tell a lot too by how we talk about faith. When we talk more about faith or “my faith” then we are in danger of turning faith into a quality in our lives rather than the instrument which receives Christ and his benefits. It also runs the risk of seeing our faith as the cause of things, good or bad, in our lives. For example, “My faith is what healed me” or “this bad thing is happening, I need to just have more faith.” But like salvation by grace alone, if faith is not completely and solely a gift and work of God, then what is faith other than something we contribute to saving ourselves? One of the most common ways of teaching salvation by works today is when faith is seen in terms of our own action.

If faith is a gift, however, and it is, then God’s grace and mercy are far reaching beyond measure. Faith no longer is about “my faith” rather faith is all about the object of it, Jesus. God has said to you, “be opened” and he has converted you to believe in Christ unto salvation. He has worked this miracle and he also keeps you in this faith. With those same things the Holy Spirit gave you faith, the means of grace, he also is the one keeping you in the faith. When you forget that or separate yourself from the word and sacraments you are placing your faith into your own hands again and it will not end well. Faith will die and you will perish eternally. God, though, is able and he will surely keep and preserve in that which he has already given you. God will not nor will he ever fail, he alone is faithful, and he alone guards and keeps you.

The things of God, the things of life heard and understood only in faith. They don’t come by your own power or your own reason or strength. A new life in Christ which turns from sin and desires all that is righteous, good, true, and beautiful only comes and flows from Jesus who alone is the righteousness of God. As Christians, the Gospel has called you. Your ears have been opened to hear the words of Jesus and know that these words are for you, and they are the words of eternal life. Don’t take that for granted in your life. Always remember who you are as one who has been given ears to hear and a tongue that has been released. Jesus has worked this miracle of faith in your life, and your life lives this faith out every day in what you say and do.

You confess Jesus in your life now as you have been given this faith in him and from him. When you hear Jesus, you then can begin to speak correctly for you have God’s word, the Holy Scriptures. The word used here for “plainly” in the reading is the word “orthos” where the words “orthodoxy” right teaching or literally right praise comes from along with “orthodontics” which is right or straight teeth. The man is healed by Jesus and speaks rightly as a Christian does whose ears have been opened to hear God’s word and that same word placed on his lips as Psalm 51 says, “O Lord, open my lips and my mouth will declare your praise.”

God, in his great mercy also gives you the very words by which you speak of Christ and his church. This is called confession. It says back what God has said to you through his word and you speak what he speaks to you. It's the voice of a loosened tongue set free to speak the words of Christ. It says back what God has said to you. You confess Christ. You, in faith, confess the Christian faith which has been handed down through the ages, this "orthodox" faith. This is the same understanding and premise which guides the church's public confession in the Book of Concord, the Lutheran Confessions.

You know who Jesus is, he is your Lord, who has redeemed you a lost and condemned person, purchased and won you from all sin, death, and the power of the devil not with gold or silver but with his holy precious blood and his innocent suffering and death that you may be his own. That's Jesus who does all things well. He's more than just some miracle worker; he's God in the flesh. He's the one who has shown you mercy to save you and he has. He's the one promised of old by the prophets and in whom all the fullness of God dwells. He's the one of whom it said, "In that day the deaf shall hear the words of a book, and out of their gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind shall see." And it's this God who has called you his own. You are his and he is yours. That's who he and who you are in all of this as you hear his word and listen with the ears of faith.

See Jesus work this miracle for this man and know this is also for you. Jesus did and does extraordinary things. Jesus gives you hope because he preaches to you, you hear Jesus clearly, and you rightly confess this Lord who worked this miracle is the same one who has redeemed you, is with you now, and will raise you up on the Last Day. In this, then, there is hope. He has shown you mercy and will show your mercy your whole life and pointing you to the glory beyond compare which is to come. Your Lord does indeed do all things well. He worked a miracle for this man. He took your sin upon himself so that you have peace with God through his blood shed for you. Jesus is crucified for you, and he is risen from the dead and you will rise from your grave as well. He still intervenes in your life. You are baptized into Christ, you have the Holy Scriptures, you have been gathered into the Holy Christian Church, he feeds you with his own body and blood given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. Don't ever doubt for one instant that Jesus isn't working in your life right now.

Dear people of God, hear these words of God today. Repent of your sin and humble yourself before the Lord. Live out your life in the words of the Gradual, "I will bless the Lord at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth. My soul makes its boast in the Lord; let the humble hear and be glad." Behold your Lord in the flesh. See Jesus and what wonders he has done in healing and this man and rejoice that he has done miraculous things for you too. He has redeemed you by his blood. He has given you faith which clings to him.

Rejoice in the miracle Jesus performed intervening in this man's life. You have hope as you know this is but a glimpse of what you will see when the Lord raises you up from grave and there is no more sin, no more suffering, and no more death. Jesus has redeemed your soul, and body and the day is coming when he will return in triumph on the clouds with the voice of an archangel and the sound of the trumpet. On that glorious and miraculous day, you will be with him and all of God's saints in a glory beyond compare. That day will be the eternal day where your eyes see fully and rightly what your faith has been confessing. Your tongue will fully proclaim the excellencies of him who bought you and join with angels and archangels and all God's saints in singing the praises to the Lamb and feasting at his banquet forever.

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