

This is, perhaps, the oddest of all Jesus' miracles. Standing up and commanding wind and waves to cease, besides the fact that it is effective in doing so, is not so strange. Bread and fish that continue to be there as person after person reaches into the basket is rather subtle. Simply cleansing a leper by the touch of a hand, again, is miraculous, but not really odd. Today, however, a man who is deaf and tongue-tied is brought by his friends to Jesus. They implore "**Him to lay His hand on him.**" Jesus sticks His fingers in the man's ears. If that weren't odd enough, He spits and touches the man's tongue. It's unclear whether Jesus simply spits on the ground, or if He spits on His hand and then touches the tongue. In either case that's rather odd. How would you feel if, when you went to the doctor with some ailment, the doctor either spat on the floor, or on his hand right before he touched the area of complaint?

And yet even more strangely, having done all this, Jesus then gives orders to unhearing ears that are plugged with His own fingers. He gives a command to a tongue that is caught by disability, and by His own, potentially spittle-soaked hand. The crowd only gets half of it right as they see the man able to hear and speak rightly. Sure, Jesus "**has done all things well,**" but He does it very *strangely* too! Why does Jesus do it this way? All the miracles demonstrate Jesus' power over nature, sickness, and the devil. The crowd is "**astonished beyond measure**" that Jesus can "**even make the deaf hear and the mute speak.**" All of Jesus' miracles prove that He is who He says He is. But the way Jesus does this miracle is not incidental. How Jesus works His signs differs, because they are all to teach us something different.

So why the odd ceremonies here? First, we need to consider what it is that Jesus heals: ears that cannot hear and a tongue that cannot speak. Jesus is in the region of the Decapolis. We heard about the Decapolis five weeks ago when Jesus fed the four thousand. The Decapolis is Gentile country. The man brought to Jesus is not a Judean. He has no knowledge of the God of Israel, has not been taught, does not know the words and promises of God. That he does not hear and cannot speak correctly is true in more ways than one. He is a picture of how all people start out in this life: unable to speak rightly concerning God, or to hear the truth of God's Word. One of our hymns preaches this truth to us:

*You were before your day of birth,
Indeed, from your conception,
Condemned and lost with all the earth,
None good, without exception.
For like your parent's flesh and blood,
Turned inward from the highest good,
You constantly denied Him. (LSB 596:2)*

Jesus alone can change this. Jesus alone undoes the obstacles to speech and sound. Not just for this one man, or for people back then, but for you. You are to see yourself in this poor man, because in him Jesus saw all of humanity, caught up and trapped in Adam's fall and captivity to sin, Satan, and death. The man's ears are opened, his tongue is loosened, by Jesus' finger, the finger of God, what Jesus in Matthew 12 says is "**the Spirit of God**" (12:28). Jesus has sent the Holy Spirit to call you by the Gospel. To bring you to faith in Jesus Christ as your Lord, the one who has redeemed you, purchased and won you from all sin, delivered you not just from spiritual deafness and muteness, but from eternal death. He has rescued you from the power of the devil.

How has He done this? Not just by a finger, but by His very self, His life, by His blood. Look at the bulletin cover. What do you see between Jesus and the man whom He heals? The blood being shed on the cross. You see it running down upon the skull and into the water. He won redemption for all those descended from Adam. He gave that redemption to you when you were baptized. There, in baptism, adults, little children, babies even, who do not, who cannot comprehend this intellectually, are told "**Ephphatha, that is, 'Be opened.'**" And their spiritual deafness, their unbelief, is put to an end. Their intellectual lack is counted for nothing as faith is given. If Jesus makes even the deaf hear and the mute speak, He can, He will, and He does, give faith to whom He pleases.

He grants you the merits of His holy blood through touch. He opens your ears and creates a new and clean heart in you, not just by touching your ears, but in uniting His entire self to you when He baptized you. He gives you a good conscience, fortifies your faith that is not just believed in the heart, but that is lived and confessed in this world, as He puts His own Body and Blood upon your lips and tongue, sprinkling you clean with the only thing that can make you clean: His body given into death, His blood shed for you.

The story of the once deaf and mute man did not end with today's Gospel reading. He went on for the rest of his life hearing and speaking, delighting in what he could now listen to and say. He would certainly avoid what grated on his ears, what would harm his hearing. He surely never tired of telling how it was that he was finally able to hear and talk. There too, you are to see yourself. It is at Christ's command and call that your tongue has been loosened from the blasphemies of unbelief to sing His glory, proclaim His mercy, shout the hope that fills you, and to speak His holy name. You are able to speak plainly, to speak rightly, to not just hear for yourself, but also confess to others the orthodox Christian faith upon the basis of Holy Scripture which you now hear and believe.

Do not stuff your ears up again with the vanity and lies of this world. The world offers plenty of earplugs, not to guard your hearing, but to close it off from the only thing that enables you to hear rightly. The world has no knowledge of the God of Israel who has saved us through death of His Son. It is not capable of speaking correctly of the words and promises of God; it distorts them, outright denies them. Do not listen to it, shun it. Mark and avoid what you know to be ungodly and untrue. It is not harmless or innocuous, you are not capable of "handling" it, it will turn you away and make you deaf to God's Word.

Let your speaking not be the parroting of the philosophies and empty deceit of this world (Col 2:8), but speak the Word of God. Meditate upon it, read it aloud, and consider it throughout the day. Let it fill your mouth and speak it to one another. Let God's way of speaking about things become your way of speaking about things. Thus, you will speak rightly in a world that shouts so much that is distorted and wrong. And in so doing, in refusing to speak as the sons of this world, in listening only the word that makes sons of the kingdom and that word coming out of you, you will bring to Christ those whom you know in this world who are still deaf and mute. Through you, your witness, your odd differentness, Christ will open their ears and hearts. He continues to do all things well.