

## Sermon for Trinity XII – Mark 7:31-37

In the Name of the Father and of the Son ✠ and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

“And they brought to [Jesus] a man who was deaf and had a speech impediment, and they begged Him to lay His hands on him.” The friends of the deaf man brought him to Jesus. His friends didn’t try to explain to the deaf-mute man why and how he had been afflicted with his condition. They didn’t say to him, “God wanted you to be deaf,” or “You should get used to not being able to speak.” His friends didn’t accuse the deaf man saying, “It was your fault that you are deaf: you are being punished for something you’ve done wrong in your life,” or “You’ve brought this upon yourself.” They were his friends. They brought him to someone who could help. They brought him to Jesus. Oh, that we could all be so fortunate to have such friends!

Perhaps a friend brought you here today. Perhaps you’ve come here today, because you already know Jesus to be your greatest friend. Even as the Lord said, “Greater love has no one than this, that Someone lays down His life for His friends.” That Someone was Jesus, who laid down His life for His friends. He has died on the cross for all of your sins. That is who Jesus is. It is what He does, why He came. Peace is created by the forgiveness won on the cross. It is peace with the Father in the bond of the Spirit through the intercession of the Son. It passes all understanding. Likewise, unity with our brothers and sisters in Christ can only be created by God. It is given where His Word reigns and men submit to it together. It will only be fully realized when we are taken from this valley of sorrows. Faith is the ultimate gift of the Holy Spirit. It is the conviction that the Holy Trinity is good, has worked out our salvation for us for free. Jesus forgives you all the wrong which you have ever done.

How does the Lord do it? How does He enter your life and forgive your sins? What did He do in the life of the deaf man? Jesus took the man aside from the crowd privately. Away from the crowd, away from the commotion, the Lord issued His command: “Ephphatha!” “Be opened.” “Ephphatha” is one of the few Greek words that is left untranslated in many English Bible versions. “Ephphatha” means “Be opened.” That’s what happened when the Lord spoke to the deaf and mute man. His ears were opened. His tongue was released. The crowd witnessed the deaf man speak. They saw the physical miracle of a man who was deaf was now able to talk plainly. But the crowd may not have realized the other miracle that had taken place: this man’s sins were forgiven. “For the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.”

The Lord commanded to the deaf-mute, “Ephphatha!” “Be opened!” Yet, the Lord never said, “Your ears be opened” or “Your mouth be opened.” Just, “Be opened.” Could the Lord not also have commanded the heart of the man to be opened? This is where true forgiveness would begin. Upon looking at the heart of the man, Jesus

would have seen the condition afflicting all mankind: He would have seen sin. "Out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, and slander." Every tree is known by what it produces. Thoughtless, angry, empty, noisy words will unveil how things look within the heart. Evil always comes forth from an evil treasury. Who then can be saved? Not a single jot or tittle of the law will perish, says the Lord. You may try to evade the sternness of the law by trying to change the words or tone them down. But the law is God's law: it is holy. The Ten Commandments, which seem so stern, are really holy and righteous and good. It's your sin that makes the Commandments, which were meant to give you life, to be your death. "... The ministry of death ..." was "... carved in letters on stone." The Law makes us cry out with the deaf-mute in the words of Ps. 38: "But I, as a deaf man, heard not; and I was as a dumb man that openeth not his mouth. Thus was I a man that heareth not, and in whose mouth are no reproofs." Sin and death have closed in on you.

It's uncomfortable to "be opened" so that someone else can see the sin of your heart and know the thoughts of your mind, let alone the Lord who created the universe! But Jesus doesn't shun and flee. He forgives. He forgives you today. Christ has set you free from the law of sin and death. You are made righteous. Your sins are covered by the righteousness of Christ. He has given a new heart within you. For the sake of Christ, you are not under the law, but under grace. Again the words of Ps. 38: "For in Thee, O Lord, do I hope; Thou wilt hear me, O Lord my God."

"Ephphatha!" "Be opened today." Be loosed from the devil's bonds. Have a ready tongue and good ears. This happens only through the preached external Word and external means of Baptism and the Lord's Supper by the work of the Holy Spirit. God works in no other way. The ministry of the Spirit has even more glory than the ministry of death. "For if there was glory in the ministry of condemnation, the ministry of righteousness must far exceed it in glory ... For if what was being brought to an end came with glory, much more will what is permanent have glory." Open your ears to hear His Word. Open your mouth to receive Him in Body and in Blood.

"My soul, now praise your Maker! Let all within me bless His name  
Who makes you fit partaker of mercies more than you dare claim.  
Forget Him not whose meekness still bears with all your sin  
Who heals your every weakness, renews your life within  
Whose grace and care are endless and saved you through the past;  
Who leaves no sufferer friendless, but rights the wrongs at last."

The Maker of all creation is the same Savior who died for your sin. He put on human flesh in all weakness. He bore your sins in that flesh and laid down His life on the cross for you. No sufferer shall be friendless who has Jesus as a Friend. Amen.

The Peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. ✠BJF✠