

Sermon for Trinity 12 – Mark 7:31-37

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

St. Mark the Evangelist introduces us to a deaf man who also had a speech impediment. It's likely that his speech impediment was a result of his inability to hear. It's difficult to learn to speak clearly without being able to hear. That is why being deaf and not being unable to speak go hand in hand.

One of the major problems this man had was not knowing what was going on around him. So much of what we know comes from what we hear. We who hear take for granted the benefits of hearing. Not being able to hear leaves you out.

We don't know much about this deaf man. At the time, our Lord was traveling through the region of the Decapolis which are the 10 cities near the Sea of Galilee. Nazareth, Jesus' hometown, was just a few miles east.

The people who brought the man to Christ knew something about Christ. They knew that if He was willing to help this man, He was able to help this man. So these friends knew enough about Jesus to bring their friend to the One who could help him.

There is no greater love than to bring your friend to Jesus. And it's not so hard to do. It requires only that, first, you have a friend; second, that you know where Jesus is; and third, that you bring your friend to where Jesus is. Your friend can be your husband or wife, your son or daughter, your neighbor, your teacher, your classmate, or coworker. Whoever it is, your friend needs Jesus.

You know where Jesus is. He promised to be with His Church until the end of time. There is no greater act of love than to invite your friend to church. The man who was deaf and suffered from a speech impediment, this man has some good friends. To be sure, they were powerless to help him. They couldn't do a thing for him. But they know who could. So they brought him to Jesus.

You have friends who suffer from all sorts of problems. You can't fix them. You wouldn't even know where to begin. But Jesus can. And He will. He is both willing and able to relieve and comfort people in need. Christ said, "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends" (John 15:13). And it is love. Pure Christian love, to bring your friend to Him who laid down His life for us all.

Here is our Savior. "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." So we pray. This is called the Invocation. We call upon God in the words of our Baptism. We lay claim to the promises God made to us when He named us and joined His name to ours. Here we gather and here Jesus promises to be. As He said, "For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:15). And again He said, "And lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20). Jesus is where His Gospel is proclaimed and where His Sacraments are administered. So He says and so we believe.

His ministry gives life. That's what the deaf man's friends gave him. By loving him enough to bring him to Jesus, they gave him life.

Note how Jesus responded to the man's need. He took him aside from the crowd. There you sit in church. There you sit, just another person in a crowd. But that's not true. That's never true. God is not like us. We can try to divide our attention between this one and that one. Mothers are quite a bit better at this than fathers, by the way. Multitasking, that is. I know I can't do it. But God can. And He does it all the time. He takes you where you are at, as you are, and loves you as an individual.

He did this for the deaf man. The man could neither hear nor speak. So our Lord communicated with him in sign language. First, He put His fingers in the man's ears. He did this

to tell him He would be giving him the ability to hear. Then He spat and touched the man's tongue. He did this to tell him He would be giving him the ability to speak. Then He looked up to heaven and sighed. He did this to tell him that the power by which He was doing what He was doing was God's power. Then Jesus spoke.

He said to him, "Ephphatha." That means, "Be opened." "And immediately his ears were opened, and the impediment of his tongue was loosed, and he spoke plainly." When Christ spoke He opened the man's ears and loosened the man's tongue and did this by speaking His Word of mercy. He gave the man what the man needed. By His Word He fulfilled the love the man's friends had shown for him by bringing him to Christ in the first place. "Ephphatha." "Be opened." It's a command and it's a cause. It does what it says. That's why we gather together in Christ's name. God's Word does in us and for us what we cannot do for ourselves.

Jesus speaks and that solves our problems for us. Beloved in Christ, it's so simple! Why can't we learn this lesson? Why do we insist on seeking God's help somewhere other than in His Word? Where else and how else has He ever helped us? Who else but God can give us the advice we need? Where else but in God's Word is the answer to whatever problem we're facing? How else but by hearing God's Word, listening to it, taking it in, will we be able to hear with the ears of faith and through that faith overcome whatever troubles us?

Our Lord told the crowd to remain silent. Tell no one. Why? Wouldn't this be great first century advertising? Why not shout His miracle from the mountain tops?

Because Christ had not yet fulfilled the Law and redeemed the human race. By leaving out the message of His suffering and death for the sin of the world, the crowd would be distorting His true work. He did not come to this world to provide healing as a prelude to death. What good are the abilities to hear and speak for people who will, sooner or later, lose all their faculties in death? Christ's mercy is greater than that! He came into the world to save us sinners from our sins by bearing them all on the cross. He came to do what we could not do as the Righteous Representative of humanity so that we, through faith in Him, would receive His righteousness as our own. Yes, He has done all things well. He made the deaf to hear and the mute to speak. The crowd got it right. But this was only one sign of Him whose mouth would be mute before His accusers and whose ears would no longer hear inside death's tomb. Yet, death He would overcome that we too might have resurrection and life to the fullest.

Sometimes we Christians don't want to go to church. We don't think it will do any good. But where God's Word is, there is Christ. When He speaks, His words accomplish what He says. We come burdened by our sins. The ministry of death, engraved on stones, speaks against us and our conscience must agree with it. We have sinned against God. We have not set Him apart as our greatest good. We have misused His name and ignored His Word. We have not loved Him with our whole heart, soul, strength, and mind. And we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. This we must confess because it's true. But confession, as good as it is, has never removed a single sin from a single soul.

Only Christ alone can do that. And He does it. What He did so long ago when He went to the cross to suffer and die, is what He gives us right here and now every time we gather in His name. The sin that blocks our ears from hearing God and that keeps our mouths from singing His praises is forgiven whenever and wherever we hear His Gospel, His absolution, and the words of the Sacrament: "given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins." Jesus speaks! "Be opened!" Now we too hear our God speak and sing His praises. Amen.

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