The Irrepressibility of the Gospel

Mark 7:31-37

Vienna Presbyterian Church
The Rev. David S. Jordan-Haas
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This morning we’ve got a jewel of a story, a Jesus story that is found only in Mark’s Gospel. First, it’s a story about the irrepressibility of the power of Jesus Christ for all to see. Second, it’s a story about the irrepressibility of the eye-witnesses proclaiming who Jesus is and what He’s done! In other words, it’s a story where Jesus can’t keep from healing, and where the people can’t keep from talking!

Here it is, Mark 7:31-37. I’ll say a few things along the way. 31 Jesus left Tyre and went up to Sidon before going back to the Sea of Galilee and the region of the Ten Greek Towns.

Note this crazy, meandering route Jesus takes. He essentially blows up the GPS routing system on this journey—a journey, some say, that might have taken him six to eight months to complete. Jesus goes from Tyre to the north through Sidon, then to the south and west, going deep into Greek Gentile territory, then back east to the Sea of Galilee.

32 A deaf man with a speech impediment was brought to Jesus, and the people begged Jesus to lay His hands on the man to heal him.

The man is deaf and mute. He can’t speak coherently, because he can’t hear anything nor himself. Here’s the cool thing: this deaf-mute man has got a posse around him who love him, are rooting for him, who care for him. He is surrounded by people who want more for the man; they are “begging” Jesus to heal him. He isn’t outcast, discarded, or forgotten. This man has worth and value. They want Jesus to heal their friend.

33 Jesus led the man away from the crowd so they could be alone.

I love it. Jesus makes the man feel as if there’s not another single living person on the entire planet! It’s just the two of them. Jesus offers Himself solely, completely to the man. Our ministries here—Stephen Ministry and Renewing Prayer—they try to be like Jesus in this same way. They are private, confidential, caring opportunities to have an encounter with the healing presence of Jesus. (A BLATENT PLUG) Let me or Pastor Glenda know if you want to be a part of or need the care of these healing ministries.

Jesus put His fingers into the man’s ears. Then, spitting on His own fingers, Jesus touched the man’s tongue. 34 Looking up to heaven, Jesus sighed and said, “Ephphatha,” which means, “Be opened!”

Jesus is so tethered to His Father-in-Heaven, from Whom His power comes. It’s a simple prayer, one word, in Jesus’ native tongue (Aramaic), “Ephphatha,” BE OPENED. This is a huge word. When Jesus uses this word (spoken nowhere else in all of Scripture) He isn’t just calling upon the man’s ears and mouth to be opened. He’s calling upon the man’s entire being—body, mind, soul, strength—to be opened, freed up! Ephphatha!

35 Instantly the man could hear perfectly, and his tongue was freed so he could speak plainly!
The healing is immediate. The man’s ears are opened; his tongue is loosed. Instantly, the man speaks clearly, plainly. As one translation describes the moment, right away the deaf-mute man is “unshackled” from a dark, silent, groaning life. (Anchor Bible) At last he has ears that hear Jesus’ voice, his friends’ voices. At last he has a tongue that speaks words of awe and glory to God. He speaks words of gratitude for his friends and neighbors around him; and they are all beyond-amazed at what they’ve witnessed.

36 Jesus told the crowd not to tell anyone, but the more he told them not to, the more they spread the news. 37 They were completely amazed and said again and again, “Everything He does is wonderful. Jesus even makes the deaf to hear and gives speech to those who cannot speak.”

The more Jesus demands silence, the more the people shout out about what Jesus has just done. They are “overwhelmed, awed beyond measure, to the extreme”! Who Jesus is, what He’s done is HUGE and the people can’t contain themselves! “Everything Jesus does is wonderful,” and the people want everyone, everywhere to know!

There you have it. This is a story, first, about the irrepressibility of the power of Jesus Christ, for all to see. It’s a story, second, about the irrepressibility of the eye-witnesses proclaiming who Jesus is and what He’s done! The power and presence of Jesus is unstoppable, unquenchable, undeniable.

This is a story of how Jesus stops at nothing to accomplish His Mission. He has come to heal and to save! And the eye-witnesses? They are determined not to be denied; they will stop at nothing when it comes to telling everyone, near and far, about Jesus.

But for many of us it’s different. The thought of sharing with others the greatness of Jesus DOES stop us in our tracks. We’re often not irrepressible, exuberant and jubilant talking about Jesus; instead we can be hesitant and resistant. We often avoid letting on about our love and allegiance for Jesus Christ. Why is that? What holds us back?

I mean, we can be outspoken about any number of projected 2016 presidential candidates. Or we can’t stop talking about that new Duck Donuts shop that just opened up in Herndon last month! And we can get pretty vocal about the latest gadget or device. We have plenty to say about that Apple Watch or Galaxy S6 Edge! Yet, in conversations with our friends or neighbors, on the street or in the office, we rarely open our mouth about this God Who performs miracles, rescues people, and gives them life!

So, what holds us back? Here are a few roadblocks or barriers. Perhaps one of these stands out for you. One, we don’t want to offend anyone. Two, we don’t want to appear foolish. Three, we don’t want to expose ourselves as too vulnerable.

First, we hold back from telling others about the goodness and greatness of our God because we don’t want to offend anyone. We live in such a hyper-politicized, hyper-sensitive world where we are afraid of hurting
feelings, stepping on toes, afraid to tell it like it is. Here’s what I mean: at the core we are a messed-up people, inadequate and afraid, and we need a Rescuer. At the core we are selfish and sinful, and we need someone who can save us from ourselves! But, oops, I didn’t mean to offend anyone when I say this. I’m so sorry. When we sign up for Jesus and His Gospel then we’re signing up for something that IS offensive. That the first will be last, and the last first? That to gain my life I’ve got to lose it for Him? That as much as I love myself I have to love my neighbor?

Second, we keep from telling others about this “way out there” God-in-Heaven Who came “down here” to earth because we don’t want to appear foolish. We live in such a hyper-critical world where appearance and attractiveness make all the difference. My sense of worth depends on how good an “impression manager” I am, right? Never mind that my business is tanking, that my marriage is in real trouble, that my kid is messed up, that I’ve got this secret problem. Everything’s OK, really. Don’t forget, please, that I’m still pretty smart, successful, and savvy. “God’s foolishness is wiser than any human wisdom;” Paul says, “and God’s weakness is stronger than any human strength.” Paul says “God chooses us, fools in our foolishness, to expose the hollow pretensions and superficial powers of this world” (1 Corinthians 1:25, 27). Are we willing to be fools for Christ? Are you and I willing to tell others about the “foolishness” of the Cross of Jesus Christ?

Third, we shy away from telling others about Jesus’ love because we don’t want to expose ourselves and appear too vulnerable. We tend to think that being too emotional, too sensitive, too sincere is just way-too weak and exposing. To risk judgement and perceptions is just too risky, too vulnerable. To talk about the One Whom I’m utterly dependent upon and literally can’t live without—wow, now that’s too much of the NAKED truth! Yet, Jesus, in the most ultimate exposure and vulnerability, gives Himself completely away. In humility and humiliation Jesus completely surrenders all. “He was despised and rejected by others; a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity….He was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon Him was the punishment that made us whole, and by His bruises we are healed.” – Isaiah 53:3-5

So what are you and I going to do about these roadblocks, barriers? Acknowledge them, name them, confess them. Ask Jesus to open your ears and eyes to all He has done and is doing right now in your life. Pray for a thankful heart that overflows; pray for an irrepressible spirit that cannot stop from sharing how good and kind our Savior is. Think of one person between now and next Sunday, and decide right now that you will tell that person one thing about the difference Jesus has made in your life.

“Lord Jesus, I see you in Your Word today. For some of us this is a tough one. With the same power to heal the deaf-mute man, send Your Spirit to break down any roadblocks, any resistance to telling others about You and Your Beauty, Your Loving-Kindness, Your Abundant Life! Give me, give us, we pray, a thankful heart and an irrepressible spirit for You. I thank You, Jesus. We thank You Jesus. I love You. We love You, Jesus. AMEN.”