

Pentecost 15 - September 5, 2021

Text: Mark 7:31-37

Theme: Unstopped Ears Hear...and that's the Challenge

We often marvel at the miracle Jesus performed when he unstopped the deaf man's ears with a single word. We note that he used physical means for the miracle: his fingers, spit and the word Ephphatha. We note that regardless of the fact that Jesus told them to keep silent, they did not and they even more zealously proclaimed this miracle. We note that the man was a Gentile which is good news for us. We too have been included into the family of God, but what we don't talk about very often is what the deaf man heard. Imagine hearing the voice of Jesus. Imagine being deaf and having never heard a Word and the first voice you hear was that of the Lord. Since the man had a speech impediment, we might well assume that he was born deaf and that had affected the way he spoke as well. I have known some deaf people, and they have an interesting view of being deaf. Many of them do not wish to hear. By not having the sense of hearing, they develop different ways of experiencing the world and they often resent any insinuation that they are disabled in any way. I wonder if the man Jesus healed felt that at all. Suddenly becoming a hearing person would surely change his life, and it would not always be changed in an easier way.

The deaf people I know have their whole world worked out around being deaf. What might seem like a handicap to us, who have our world organized around hearing is not seen as a handicap

at all to them. Their language is rich and varied incorporating motion, facial expression and eye movement. Our spoken language can seem a little dull to those who really understand sign language.

I think this miracle of healing the deaf man can be a metaphor for becoming a Christian as well. If you think about the way sin works, it corrupts God's creation. So, when we were created in our mothers' wombs, we were perfect, righteous and holy. Then sin corrupted us almost instantaneously and we lost our holiness. We became spiritually handicapped so that we did not know Jesus. We were not part of God's family. We were destined for Hell. Then Jesus created faith in us through the power of His Word in Holy Baptism. It was at that moment that he unstopped our ears of faith so that we could hear him speak to us.

Now there are times when I grow weary of hearing Jesus. You might think that is a terrible thing to say, but it is true. There are times I wish I could live my life any way I want and not have to consider what Jesus says. There are times when I wish I could dismiss or ignore people who disagree with me and not treat them as the brother or sister that Jesus has made them to be for me. There are times when I wish I could spend the money I give to the Church on something fun. If Danya and I just stopped giving to the Church, we could afford that European river cruise we've always wanted to take! But Jesus says to give a faithful offering, to give back a faithful percentage of all that he gives to us.

See, unstopped ears hear...and that is the challenge for us Christians. We do hear Jesus and we know what he expects of us. We know where we fall short of his expectations. In our prayer of the day we pray,

“O Lord, let Your merciful ears be open to the prayers of Your humble servants and grant that what they ask may be in accord with Your gracious will.” That’s the hard part. It’s not a mystery. We know God’s will, and we know what to ask, but all those sins of which Jesus speaks try to interfere and stop us from asking for what is true and right and holy.

What unstops our ears so that the pure Word of God flows into us and takes us over? The water of baptism washes out our dirty spiritual ears. The body and blood of Jesus heals our spiritual hearing. Just like Jesus used his spitty fingers to unstop the deaf man’s ears he uses baptismal water and his own body and blood to unstop ours. God always uses physical things to heal us.

However, be prepared. We will not always like what we hear. Just as deaf people often do not want the sense of hearing because they are quite content in their silent world, when our spiritual ears are unstopped, we may be faced with realities that we did not want to ponder. It’s easy to throw up your hands in the face of sinful behavior as though you had no choice until you are faced with the reality that you do have a choice. It’s easy to treat your brother or sister with disdain because you believe you have been wronged by

them and refuse to forgive them until Jesus speaks to you from the cross where he won your complete forgiveness without any worthiness or merit on your part.

Sometimes, we would rather not hear Jesus speak. It's too hard. But we pray that God will with His Word empower our faith to begin to love what we hear, to repent of our own sinful desires and thoughts, to see where we are wrong and to turn back to God again and again and again.

Having your ears of faith unstopped is a beautiful thing because you get to hear Jesus' voice of love and forgiveness for you. There are changes that have to be made once you are filled with the power of God. That power makes it extremely difficult to keep one foot in the world and one foot in the Church, and being in and of the world becomes naturally more and more uncomfortable. But once we let go of the world and dive headlong into the Church, we begin to quickly see that all the things that seemed so alluring in the world were really mirages, phantoms, lies that Satan uses to try to distract us. In Holy Baptism, your spiritual ears have been unstopped! Rejoice in the power that God is pouring into you and let go of anything and everything that was part of your old, sinful nature. You are free now to let go of discontent, hatred, jealousy, vengeance, lust. All of those things and everything else that is sinful was part of your old language. Now you hear Jesus' Word, and His righteousness flows through you.