

Pentecost 15 - September 6, 2015

Text: Mark 7:31-37

Theme: With Just One Word

“Ephphatha.” “Be opened.” Who knew it was that easy? So I guess there was never a case of deafness in the world after that right? Since all you need is a little spit and the Aramaic word for “be opened.” But that is not the case. This was a very specific miracle done for our benefit. Jesus told the formerly deaf man not to tell anyone. Why? Because his calling to this world was not primarily that of miracle worker but of savior. Of course, no one could keep quiet and he ended up with huge crowds following him around wanting a miracle, a healing, a full belly of fish and bread or some other earthly thing.

But nonetheless, Jesus took the deaf man aside and healed him. Why? Because Jesus is the ultimate prophet. He not only speaks his word but he lives his word out in his actions.

Think about it. We live our lives one day at a time and through our experiences we adopt a worldview and through the worldview, we interpret all the events in our lives. In my family, French Toast is made a certain way, but Danya grew up with French Toast made a different way. Why is it so hard for her to admit that her way is WRONG? My whole family knows that our way of making French Toast is the right way. Now you laugh – but you laugh because you know your own “French toast” idiosyncrasies.

We develop idiosyncratic beliefs and ideas about spiritual things as well. We harbor our own little fleet of personal theology and dare anyone to rock our boats. Even when confronted with the pure word of God we will argue, rationalize and as a last act of desperation attack the character of the messenger, because we are deathly afraid of the message he brings. We fear the message because his message undoes our belief.

Like the Pharisees, and like the tax collectors and the Romans, we are, at some level, always concerned that the Gospel will undo our own little personal world. And that fear is justifiable... because it will. Jesus himself says that his message will cause fights between family members and upset our whole

system. Jesus calls the Gospel a stumbling block because it interrupts all of our copasetic human systems and interjects God's way into the middle of everything. We spiritually stumble over God's truth.

But even as a stagger and stumble this way and that, Jesus will not leave us alone. Just like he would not let this man live without sound and speech, he will not let us sit stubbornly refusing to hear his Word because it upsets our personal theological system. Over and over again, he just keeps coming at us, breaking us down until our ears are opened and he can finally get in.

When I was a high school kid in Alabama, most of my friends were Bible Church folks. They didn't know what a Lutheran was but they suspected I was a part of some weird German cult. I would be asked regularly if I had found Jesus. That is a ludicrous question based on the false belief that salvation is initiated by human beings who seek it. NO! Salvation is initiated by the Holy Spirit through the Word of God and Baptism. I often thought, "Find Jesus? How could I miss him? He won't leave me alone. He's always walking into my life and demanding my attention and I'm always stumbling over him." I'm just like any other sinner. I would much rather do things my way – make my own rules that are easy for me to follow. I would prefer to justify whatever it is I want to do and never be beholding to a higher authority. I would much rather walk by sight not by faith.

But Jesus sticks his fingers in my ears and says "Be Opened!"

"Hey! Listen up," he says, "I created this world and guess what? I know how to run it and you don't – and furthermore, every time you try to run it, you mess it up worse than it was in the first place."

We mess stuff up so bad when we're not listening to Jesus. We're sinful and he is not. It seems like eventually we would figure that out. We are sinful and he his righteous. Don't even try to do it your way. Just listen to him. Ephphatha! Be Opened!

He gives us His Word. He gives us Pastors and Teachers and parents and grandparents and that nice old lady who sits in the pew in front of us to proclaim His Word to us by word and deed. He gives us each other to hold one

another accountable to his Word. When we listen, our spiritual ears are opened!

We can be open to joy. You know being a Christian is not supposed to be a drag. The point of worship is not to gather together to see who is able to be most miserable. It is to sing and pray and heck, maybe even laugh, or at least smile really loudly. We are the elect. What on earth do we have to be down about?

We can be open to forgiveness. Folks, Christ did not come to condemn the world but to save the world. I know that there are Christians who honestly believe that they have to keep track of everyone's sin. Is God a liar? The truth is that God forgave us all our sins on the cross. He's not sitting up in Heaven taunting – "whoops, you forgot this one." God is clear. Jesus Christ died once and for ALL! Ephphatha! Be opened!

Bask in the power of forgiveness. You have no sin. Your sins are as far from you as the east is from the west. You are completely clean children of God. Jesus has done what was required to pay for your sins and you are free. Whatever sin has plagued you is gone. It is paid off. It is powerless in your life. Stop being so stubbornly deaf. Ephphatha! Be Opened!

Be open to new direction and new ideas. See, once the deaf man could hear, his tongue was loosened and he could speak. There was probably someone there who thought he shouldn't begin speaking because after all, he'd never done it that way before. I'm sure there were people in his life who found it difficult to get used to him hearing and speaking. That is just sinful human nature to prefer to stay in a bad situation because it is a known quantity. People stay in dead end jobs because they figure they can't do better. People accept abuse because they feel they don't have any power to stop it. But that is not what Jesus says! Jesus says we are set free from such nonsense. The Gospel says we are the masters of creation and that creation cannot master us.

Ephphatha! And our minds are loosened! We are able to think in new ways and see new possibilities. We are able to get outside of ourselves and our personal perceived needs and focus on the opportunities to spread God's love that lie all around us. Just as the deaf man's tongue was bound, so our

spirits can be bound into the ruts of time so that we believe that we are never capable of more than we have accomplished in the past. But our hearts and minds have been opened. Our faith has grown and we are capable of infinitely more than we even imagine.

Ephphatha! Be opened. Shake off the chains that shackle you and stop believing that you are bound in any way. You are a royal priest. Stop believing that you are powerless in the world – the world does not own the Church. We are not tossed to and fro on the tides of the world. We are the royal priests. We are the crown of creation and it is time that we took our rightful places in this creation. Ephphatha! Be Opened!