

Sermon for the Fifteenth Sunday After Pentecost

Mark 7:31-37 – Listening and Speaking the Gospel

Grace, peace, and mercy from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.
Amen

Jesus bestows two gifts or miracles in today's gospel: Hearing and Speaking. The man could not hear or speak clearly. He had a speech impediment. Jesus touched the man's ears and tongue and gave him the gift of hearing and speaking, thus fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy, "...the ears of the deaf unstopped...and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy."

Two gifts given. Two gifts that go together: Hearing and speaking. Each one of us did not come out of the womb with the ability to do either. We learn to speak through hearing, watching mom and dad talk to us. We try to repeat words and sounds we hear from mom and dad. We try to copy them. It does not come easy. It takes time. IT takes work and practice to get the tongue, vocal cords, and lips to coordinate to from words that are heard.

Friends of this man bring him to Jesus knowing Jesus can make Him well. Jesus takes Him aside and speaks in a language he can understand. Sign language:

1. Jesus puts His fingers into his ears showing him that his ears will be opened.
2. Jesus spits and places spittle, for the ancients believed one's spit had healing properties, on his tongue showing him that his tongue will be healed.
3. Jesus looks up to heaven showing the man where Jesus' power is coming from.
4. Jesus sighs showing the man Jesus' emotion and grief at the brokenness of mankind because of Satan.

The people who witnessed this miracle that day respond with amazement. After Jesus touched him and spoke the word, “EPHPHATHA,” the man could hear and speak clearly. And it happened right away! It all came as a gift of God in Jesus Christ! Two miracles, two gifts imparted that day. Jesus has done everything well.

So, it with you and me. As early as the 4th century the church added to word, “EPHPHATHA” to the baptismal liturgy to show that Jesus was touching you, opening your ears with the gospel, and your mouth to speak the gospel. In the church you hear the God’s Word and speak it as well. When Martin Luther came along in the 16th century, he started removing a lot of clutter that had obscured the gospel, but kept the word, “EPHPHATHA”, not because of its necessity, but because witness of what was happening.

It happens today. We hear and we speak. God speaks in His Word, and we speak back. We hear God who gives us His law that we sin and have fallen short of His glory, and we speak back, “I confess that I have sinned in thought, word, and deed.” There is more. God speaks and reveals who He is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, how He created us, loved us by sending His Son into world to die for us on the cross to win forgiveness of our sins and to make us His children. We hear Jesus teaching us to pray and we speak to God with the words, Our Father who art in heaven. We speak these words confident that we have a Father in heaven who is always open and listens to our prayers. Upon waking in the morning, we open the service for morning prayer with the words, “O open my lips, and my mouth shall declare Your praise.” Gifts received and gifts responded to.

Jesus opened the man’s ears and opened his lips and loosened his tongue that day. I just wonder what the words this man first spoke after Jesus opened his lips. Maybe words like our Psalm forth day, “Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord, O my soul! I will praise the Lord as long as I live; I sing praises to my God all my life long.” Psalm 146:1-2. When it happened to him, He was like a little child once learning to speak, could

not stop talking. Even after charged the witnesses to speak about this, they could not. They proclaimed it everywhere.

What is interesting we have that opposite problem. We don't speak enough about God in Christ has done for us. It is as if the devil has touched our ears and tongue and said, "Be Closed." Whether it out shyness, or rules about what is can be said and not said, social courtesy, or fear of ridicule, we tend to keep quiet concerning the gospel.

If our ears and tongue is not closed the wrong word come out. Words that don't praise or confess Jesus as Lord and savior. Words that do not help or encourage but cause hurt. Words that do not forgive but condemn. Perhaps words that we would expect to come from the world or unbelievers. But words that are belittling coming from Christians? This should not be so!

As James puts it our faith and words confess what our heart believes. It is not that we are unbelievers, but we find ourselves weak at times and strong at other times, afraid at times and bold at other times, trusting and then unfaithful. We seem to be all over the place. Up and then down, saints and sinners at the same time. Children of God but living not yet delivered from this body of sin.

Inconsistent we are! This morning we are once again called to hear about the one spoke the whole truth about God's truth and whose words of actions lined up with His Father in heaven. This Jesus, who we can always rely on. Even what said and did would get Him nailed to the cross, he never retreated, but went forth dying for your sins. And then when said he would be raised from the dead, he was. And He promised that we would leave you alone and He has not. These are word spoken to you for to hear and believe. Words heard and to be spoken. To say Amen. I believe, help my unbelief.

And this is a gift that keeps on giving, In His Word, In His Supper, The gift of faith and strength as we journey, sometimes with struggle, in this world. This of forgiveness when we fall. And the gift of new life. It is

the gift of salvation and the promise future in heaven with Him for all believers. This all comes from Jesus who opened the ears and tongue of deaf and mute man. All in Jesus who says, I give you my body and blood as a pledge to sustain you on this journey.

Hearing this promise, may we speak, confess, and rejoice. All that have is gift. Gifts that can now be shared. Words of encouragement, words that speak of God's love in Jesus, and word of forgiveness. These are words we can speak not because God needs them, but your neighbor needs them. To believe, to comfort when hurting, encouragement when feeling defeated. Hope amid tragedy. You never know what these gifts can do. Probably far more than you can imagine or think.

Jesus gave gifts that day and he does the same today. Give ears to hear and the tongue to speak the glories of your name.

Amen.