

The Healing of the Deaf Man

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[0:00] We pray, Lord, that in the power of the Holy Spirit, you will do the same again this morning. That you will continue to open eyes that are blind and ears that are deaf.

And for those whom, by your mercy, you've given sight to, that you will illumine our eyes and our sight even further as we spend this time in your word this morning.

And encourage our hearts to bear the light of Christ into the world. We pray this in Jesus' name.

Amen. This morning we are in Mark 7.

It's page 1002 in your Pew Bible. I will ask us, actually, to put a finger there. And then also open to Isaiah 35, which we read as our first lesson this morning.

That's on page 707 of your Pew Bible. If you are using the Pew Bible. Amen. Just this time last year, I preached from this same text.

[1:06] I think that was actually on the occasion of Nico's baptism. I was going to say to all of you to remember to wish him a happy anniversary of his first anniversary of his baptism.

But he's not here this morning. So you can call his parents. And I say that not to suggest that because I've preached on this same text a year ago for you to take the next half hour off and tune off and tune out.

I hope you wouldn't do that. I pray that instead that God in his mercy will grant us all he is to hear his word. Just as the deaf man in our passage this morning heard the word that Jesus spoke to him. That we will hear God's word. So I invite you to open to the text before us. But before we go again to the gospel reading, bear with me as we turn our eyes to Isaiah 35.

This miracle account that we have in Mark is actually only in Mark's gospel. We don't see it in Matthew's or Luke's, neither in John's.

[2:14] It's only this particular kind of this deaf and mute man is only to be found in Mark's gospel. And I think Mark is doing something here. And you see that through his gospel. He is telling a story about Jesus.

He is an evangelist through and true. He's telling the story of Jesus as who he is. And through his works. And then you know the pivotal point in Mark's gospel is chapter 8, right?

That's the turning point. When Peter confesses Jesus as the son of God. And then turning a pivot from then on, Mark starts to tell us about Jesus starts to teach.

And Mark reveals that in his gospel on his journey to Jerusalem. But we're still in the first half of Mark's gospel, if you were to divide it into two. We're coming to the end of the first part.

First half, as it were, of Mark's gospel in chapter 7. And what Jesus is doing here in Mark's gospel, and Mark wants us to see that, is a fulfillment of prophecy.

[3:18] Particularly Isaiah's prophecy, Isaiah 35. What does the account say? And look at the gospel, by the way, before we even go to Isaiah.

Look at what's going on in Mark. It's a very peculiar miracle. Oftentimes, Jesus, when he heals, speaks a word. A word from Jesus would have been sufficient in this case, too.

As he did in the previous, early on in the same chapter, in verse 24 to 30. With the seraphimician woman who came to him. To ask him for a daughter to be healed.

What did Jesus do? Even from a distance, Jesus spoke a word. And the daughter was healed. A word, in this case, would have been sufficient. Jesus was powerful enough to just speak a word.

But he didn't. All this, I think, suggests that what we have here in Mark's account is a parabolic miracle. But what I mean by that is that it's a miracle, but meant to teach us, primarily first, to teach the disciples, more about who Jesus is, and what he's come to do, and by inference to teach us as well, who follow after the apostles.

[4:34] So a miracle, this is really what we have before us here, is a miracle that reveals a spiritual truth about the person and work of Jesus. And this work is, again, as I said before, is a fulfillment of prophecy in Isaiah 35.

And I hope you open to Isaiah 35 on page 707. I will just read through some of it. I won't read the whole chapter again. But look at, beginning in verse 3 of Isaiah 35.

It says, strengthen the weak hands, make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who have an anxious heart, be strong, fear not.

Why? Behold, your God will come. Behold, your God will come. And it continues in verse 5.

Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped. This is what will happen at the coming of your Lord.

[5:40] The eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf will be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy. For waters will break forth in the wilderness, streams in the desert.

And the burning sand shall become a pole, and the thirsty ground springs of water, and the hunt of jackals where they lie down. The grass shall become reeds and rushes. There will be an abundance at the coming of the Lord. I wonder how the original ears of Isaiah would have conceived of this fact that, Behold, your God will come.

They would never in the wildest dream have thought that their God will come in the way that he came. In the person of Jesus Christ. To become as one of them. To inhabit, to embody humanity. And then by that to redeem humanity. But this is what Mark wants us to see. This Jesus, who is traveling around Galilee, and about to head down south to Jerusalem.

This Jesus is Israel's God. Who has come to them. And he comes with healing in his hands. He's come to open the eyes of the blind and to unstop.

[6:55] Death hears. So they may hear. And what is the deepest spiritual reality of this miracle that Mark wants us to see? He wants us to know that this is fulfilled in Jesus.

He wants us to see that Jesus is God. He's come to save. And he wants us to know that he's come to open the eyes of the blind and to stop the deaf ears. So that we can hear primarily, not just a physical, he has been here.

Eyes being made to see. But spiritually, our ears can be opened to hear the word of life. The word of the gospel. The good news of salvation.

That's the deepest spiritual reality. And Mark records this event in the earthly ministry of our Lord. And there are three particular things I want us to see. Primarily, how does this affect Jesus' original audience?

Which is the twelve. Remember that he's with his disciples. He's in a region in this gospel. And we can turn, by the way, back to page 1002 of our Mark's gospel now.

[7:58] He's in the Gentile region of Galilee. A few times in his ministry, he went to this region. And Mark tells us that he's in Tyre and Sidon and the region of the Decapolis.

These are all neighboring towns around the Sea of Galilee. But this area is predominantly Gentile. And we see that because it's just earlier. Earlier in Mark, he had met the demoniac, the Gerasene man, and healed him.

And here is the second visit to the area. And he's healed the daughter of the Seraphim woman. And they brought this man to him. They begged him. Will you please heal this man? And deliver him.

They recognized the power of God in the life of Jesus. And Jesus laid his hand on him, we're told. He took him aside, though, from the crowd.

And then he put his fingers into his ears, we're told. And looking up to heaven, and after spitting and touching his tongue, he looked up to heaven, he started and said to him, Ephraim, be open.

[9:04] Jesus has stopped the ears of this man. So far in the Gospel of Mark, it is increasingly clear that the main issue for us is the disciples' inability to understand Jesus.

That's where we are in the Gospel. It really does a lot to end, right? So this miracle is meant, again, to reveal that there's still clouded highs and stopped ears.

Earlier in this section, or later on in this section, Jesus will talk to them about, I haven't heard, so they're not here. They don't understand who he is. They don't yet still fully understand what he's come to do.

And Jesus said to them, I haven't heard, do you not see? I haven't heard, sorry. Do you not see? And I haven't heard. Do you not hear? This is Jesus' appeal to them.

What the apostles, the twelve, they are unable to see and hear that Christ is the Messiah. They are unable yet to see that he is the Son of God, the Redeemer of Israel, and the Savior of the world. [10:10] And the truth is that, left to themselves, they cannot see or hear the truth concerning Jesus. Even though they are the closest to him.

You realize what an enormous statement that is. These twelve apostles are the closest to Jesus. They go in and out with him. But left to themselves. Even they cannot see Jesus as he truly is. They don't have the capacity in and of themselves to open their own eyes, you see.

To unstop their deaf ears, to hear. Only through divine intervention from God can they hear the good news of the gospel properly and clearly.

And it isn't until they've heard this gospel openly and clearly and understand it rightly that they can then speak plainly and boldly.

[11:05] These twelve men are the ones, well, eleven of them, are the ones that Jesus is going to task with going out with his gospel. They will be the first proclaimers of this good news.

And yet here, they don't fully have it yet. But it will only take God himself opening, doing the work of revealing himself, opening their ears to hear.

And of course, I think this should make it clear to us as well that when someone responds to the preaching of faithful witness of the gospel, when anyone responds to the gospel, it is God the Father who has done the work of bringing them to his Son through the power of God the Holy Spirit. It is nothing short of a miracle. If you have believed the gospel of Jesus Christ, you've taken it and you've believed it and you believe in Jesus as your Lord and Savior, you, brother, you, dear sister, are walking miracle.

You haven't done it in your own power. It is God, God in his mercy that has unstopped your ears and opened your eyes so that you can see Christ as he really is.

[12:21] And this should be clear to all of us as well when we proclaim the gospel. That is why our proclamation of the gospel should be gutted up, attended with prayer. We do not do this with arms of flesh alone.

We do it in the power of the Holy Spirit. Looking to God to bless our efforts. To do the work himself. God himself to do the work of opening people's ears.

So let's look at this deaf mute more closely. Perhaps we might be able to recognize something of ourselves and our world in this man.

You know, the thing about deaf people, and I had to read a bit more about it. I don't know anyone close to me that's deaf. But you might, and you might be able to agree with this, deaf people cannot hear the sound they make.

So oftentimes, their speech, it's not so much, and that's probably what's going on with this man. It's not that he doesn't have the capabilities to make sound with his mouth, but because he's deaf, and likely maybe deaf from early on in his life, either as a young child, or maybe he's always been deaf, he cannot hear sound, he cannot hear speech.

[13:48] And so he cannot make out and speak clearly, because he cannot hear aright. Their deafness affects their ability to speak properly. And isn't this a spiritual truth?

And this is what Mark wants us to see. Unless we hear rightly and clearly, we cannot speak boldly and clearly.

That's what's going on with the 12. They are still yet unable to hear Jesus clearly. And so how can they go out with the message and the gospel of Jesus Christ if they cannot hear and see Jesus clearly?

And so what then is the grand purpose of Jesus' miracle in this passage? Note the progression of the miracle as told by St. Mark. We're told that Jesus put his fingers into this man's ears after spitting, touched his tongue, and looking up to heaven, he sighed and said, Ekphata, that is be opened.

And his ears were opened. And his tongue was released. And he spoke plainly. Do you see the progression? It was first the hearing that had to change.

[15:03] If the man is to speak intelligibly, he must first be able to hear rightly. The opening of his ears is then centrally related to his tongue being loosened.

What's the implication of this for us? Well, as a commentator said, It is only as the church hears the word of God that it has anything worthwhile to say.

I'm going to repeat that. It is only as the church, that is, you and I gathered together, it is only as we hear the word of God that we have anything worthwhile to say.

And so, brothers and sisters, are we sitting under God's word? Because if we're not doing that, we have nothing to say to the world around us.

We don't hear aright, we cannot speak aright. If we lose the Bible, we lose the pulpit.

[16:03] And if we lose the pulpit, we lose the congregation. That's Dick Lucas. Those words are not mine, but I'm still in it from him. If we lose the Bible, we lose the pulpit.

If we lose the pulpit, we lose the congregation. You see the progression. It is first right hearing that leads to right speaking. This is why you should pray for your pastors.

This is why I covet your prayers. That I will always sit under God's word. That I will have time to devote to God's word. Because if I do not do that, I have nothing to say to you.

If you do not do that, you have nothing to say. If you're a parent trying to raise your children to know the Lord and to follow after God, if you're not sitting, hearing God's word, you have nothing to say to them.

And look, what does this look like in the world today? There are churches where people still stand in pulpit every Sunday and proclaim, thus says the Lord. But they have not done the work of sitting under that same word.

[17:12] And so what does their preaching look like? What does their proclamation look like? It looks like jubbled guggly good. There's no better way to put it because that's really often what it comes out like.

It is the world's wisdom jumbled up and repackaged to look like God's word.

And it is full of compromises and capitulations to the world. And oftentimes you hear them, you say, I could have gotten this at the Elk Club down the street.

I don't know why I need to wake up at 9 a.m. on Sunday morning to prepare to come to church. It is the world's wisdom. It is only as we hear the word of God that we have anything worthwhile to say.

And brothers and sisters, I hope you yourself will learn discernment and prepare yourself to be hearing God's word all right.

[18:16] Because this is what it looks like as well for you in the pews. If you're not accustomed to sitting under God's word and hearing God's word, what does Paul say in his epistle in Ephesians?

You'll be thrown around by every passing wind. It is this word that grounds us in the truth of who God is.

And so that when you hear those so-called spiritual men who says, we have the spirit of the Lord and we come in the spirit of the Lord to say the words of the Lord, you hear their words and you say, this word that this so-called person is saying does not agree with the word of God.

You can then rightly, rightly surmise that this is not the spirit of the Lord. Because the spirit of God does not disagree with the word of God.

This is his inspired word. God is not like us. He's not double-minded. He does not lie. He does not make mistakes. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

[19:31] This is why we must sit under God's word so that we can learn to rightly discern and judge rightly. I hope you would do that when you sit even under my preaching every Sunday.

That you would judge and measure it against God's word. That is your duty as a believer in Jesus Christ. And your task. Do not lose the Bible.

Let's look then. So we see now how the opening of the ears leads to the opening of the tongue so that they can speak or write.

But let's look now at the Gentile world and that this miracle is being done in. And even ourselves.

Let's turn away a little bit from the disciples and look to us.

We must realize that all Christian preaching and teaching and testimony is a miracle. every time it's done. Every time we in this church in this parish open God's word.

[20:38] Every time we teach Bible study downstairs. Every time we gather in small groups. Every time we even informally gather and open God's word. It's a miraculous thing that's being done.

Because God is present with us by the work of his Holy Spirit working in us to continue to illuminate our minds opening our eyes and stopping our ears to hear the words of life.

It is nothing short of a miracle. Look what Jesus did before he did a miracle. He's looking up to heaven we're told in verse 34. He sighed and said to him Epheserah that is be open.

Why is it that Jesus looked up to heaven? I think Jesus looking up to heaven indicated that the power by which he operates is not of this world. It is from above.

It is heavenly. It is supernatural. It is divine. We will do well likewise to look to heaven like our God our Lord does and ask God to grant us the power that our gospel work may be blessed with divine unction.

[21:47] Brothers and sisters we must be people who are praying attentive and devoted to prayer asking God to bless the work of our hands. It cannot be done with human efforts alone.

I remember that this time last year when I was preaching on this text I introduced a time of prayer morning and evening prayer. Perhaps we didn't succeed so well in that I'm afraid to say. but I think the Lord might be telling us something because God wants to be with us in our prayer as we look to him and ask for his divine help and we brothers and sisters in this parish are at a precipice where an inflection point if I may say that where we must turn to God in prayer and perhaps maybe it's worthy for us to restart that again morning prayer and we will in October so you can keep me accountable to that morning prayer at 8 in the morning we will gather as God's people if it's not all the five days of the week we'll probably do at least three times in the week but we will gather for morning prayer and reading God's word and it will be on Zoom so you can join us right in your ease

I might do a survey whether 7 or 8 a.m. is preferable because so we'll follow along with that but why are we doing that well first because as Anglicans that's how rightly our patrimony that we have is that we're formed around word and prayer but secondly because we want the word of God to go to come in and grow us and to go to go out from us into the world so that others may be drawn to the light of Christ the proclamation of the gospel is not something that is done by human powers we need divine help we must be people who are devoted to God in prayer asking for that Jesus gives us an example of this by looking up to heaven and then the other thing that we are meant to look the other application I want to point out in this text for us is to guard ourselves

I've repeated myself I think a lot in this sermon about saying the word of God is what we must listen to and sit under brothers and sisters I'm happy to repeat myself again and again about that because that is at the heart of what we're about if the word of God is not our foundation then anything we build is built on sand there are three things that we ought to be to three steps I think that we must guard ourselves against because here's the temptation the temptation is to elevate traditions by that I mean traditions of men or and by that I mean the cultures traditions or even our own perceived traditions we can build up a tradition in this parish and say this is the way we do things this is what's righteous and this is what's not and that's nothing based on scripture or the traditions of the world and traditions can be seen as things that enrich even protect us protect the truth and the word of [25:35] God but here's the temptation when we devote ourselves merely to the traditions and the way we've always been doing things and we neglect the word of God something else is going to become our foundation it will be the tradition rather than the word and as time goes on what we will find is that traditions then will gain equal authority with the truth of the word of God so that instead of turning to God's word the things that we will turn to first and foremost is a tradition isn't this what Jesus was combating the Pharisees about they were holy men they will put many of us to shame in the way they live their lives but Jesus says you've deserted the word of God for the tradition of men we must guard our hearts against that we must make sure that we're not the traditions doesn't usurp the authority of the word of God and replace the truth of God's word as the scepter rule of life and practice for us and lastly let's look back in the text

Jesus healed this man and upon healing him Jesus charged them not to tell anyone but the more he charged them what did they do the more they say zealously they proclaimed him we're told and they were astonished verse 37 they were astonished beyond measure saying he has done all things well evil makes the deaf hear and the mute speak this will be the inevitable declaration of every Christian on that day on that last day when we are guided to him when we see saints from the persecuted church from the centuries before and perhaps in God's heritage centuries after us when we're all gathered we will say the same thing these men are saying and women are saying in the capitalist region he has done all things well he even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak and we will be the deaf that have been made to hear and the mute that have been given words to speak as we gathered on that last day there will be moments though before then when because of the temptations of the world because of the temptations of the flesh and the temptations of the devil you might think that what

God is doing in you and perhaps through you is not well at all you might think I'm just fumbling through you might look around at your brothers like he's just fumbling through too you might look around and say we are just fumbling through but here's the testimony you might even look at your children as a Christian parent and you might say they're just fumbling through but here is the comforting word the word of God and the work of God is ongoing in you and in us and in your children do not lose heart it is ongoing in all of us we will say truly he has done all things well on that day when he presents us to his father without blemish holy and blameless not on our own merits not because we are in our ourselves holy and blameless because he has made us so by his perfect and finished work so dear

Christian persevere remain stand firm on the word of God do not lose heart open your ears sit under God's word and let him give you the words to say so that you may not speak that same word after having heard it rightly that you may not speak it rightly and truly we will say that he has done all things well let us pray grant Lord we beseech you that the words which we have heard this day with our outward ears may through your grace be so grafted inwardly in our hearts that they may bring forth in us the fruit of good living to the honor and praise of your name through Jesus Christ our Lord Amen Amen