

Trinity XII

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Preacher: Father Randall Russell

[0 : 00] In the name of the Father and of the Son of the Holy Ghost. As the old saying goes, actions speak louder than words.

So this morning I thought rather than focus on our Lord's words and teachings, we might instead focus upon our Lord's actions. Because our Lord does some pretty peculiar things in this morning's gospel that probably should not go unnoticed.

First, our Lord sticks his fingers into the deaf and mute man's ears. And that in itself is kind of odd. But then our Lord spits.

Most likely to moisten his fingers, but we aren't really told why. But he spits, at which time he touches the deaf and mute man's tongue. And again, that is kind of strange.

But then our Lord looks up to heaven and sighs. Before he finally says, Ephafatha, which means be opened.

[1 : 17] At which time the deaf and mute man is immediately healed. Now I'm sure it doesn't surprise any of us that Jesus could heal a deaf and mute man.

I mean, this is the kind of thing we have all come to expect from our Lord. Jesus Christ is, after all, a great healer. No surprises there.

But what probably does surprise us a little is exactly how our Lord does it. I mean, why the need for all this ritual and bizarre actions?

Couldn't our Lord just as easily have healed this deaf and mute man with only one word? Of course he could. But he doesn't.

Instead, he chooses to touch, to spit, to look up to heaven and to sigh. Before he even says one single word.

[2 : 19] And why? Well, maybe our Lord did these things so that it might be clear to the deaf and mute man exactly where his healing was coming from.

Or maybe our Lord did these things to show us that actions speak just as loudly as words.

You know, it's pretty easy to talk the talk. But ministry and the act of serving our neighbor often requires a certain level of intimacy that very few are comfortable with.

Years ago, when I was serving an Anglican church in Florida, probably one of the best things I saw that congregation do was that every week, a different group from the church would provide, as well as serve, one of the meals for the poor and homeless in the community at a local shelter.

And doing this on a weekly basis was certainly, certainly no small task. It required a significant amount of time, money, manpower, and even a certain amount of risk.

[3 : 39] Occasionally, church members who forgot to lock their vehicles while serving at the shelter would have things stolen from them. Other times, some church members might feel insulted by some of the outlandish things that a few of the mentally unstable people at the shelter would say.

But overall, the experience was very, very positive. It's just that the field of the poor and homeless can be a field filled with both wheat and tares.

But honestly, that's true of every other field in life as well. Yet what I saw church members learn, and what I myself relearned from that experience, was that ministry isn't just something we do on Sunday mornings, or in a beautiful building throughout the week, or even something we just do in the comfort and privacy of our own home among family and friends.

For in the incarnation, God himself entered this world of sickness, sin, and death precisely in order to get his hands dirty, to stick his fingers into the ears of the deaf, to share saliva with the mute, and to touch those afflicted with sin and every other malady in order to heal and make many whole.

Ephothophah, be opened, Jesus said. But it is our Lord's actions that spoke just as loudly as his words. For God's mercy, his love, and his peace are made open to us, not only through the

teachings and words of our Lord, but most especially through his actions.

[5 : 42] And by God's grace, may the same be true for us as well. For Christian ministry isn't just about what we think, or what we say, or what we teach, but it is most especially what we do.

And that might involve us all taking some risks, and doing some things that we don't necessarily feel comfortable doing, and going some places that we don't necessarily feel comfortable going.

But let us not forget, the gospel is not about our personal comfort. It is about Christ.

It is about salvation. Therefore, today, Jesus tells us all, Ephothophah, that is, be open. Be open to the Holy Spirit's direction.

For today, we see the actions. Actions speak just as loudly, and in most cases, even louder than words.

[6 : 50] In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.