

Sermon for September 16, 2012 – 16th Sunday after Pentecost

Mark 7:31-37

Theme: Jesus takes us aside. . .

- 1) *To heal us physically.*
- 2) *To heal us spiritually.*

³¹ Then Jesus left the vicinity of Tyre and went through Sidon, down to the Sea of Galilee and into the region of the Decapolis. ³² There some people brought to him a man who was deaf and could hardly talk, and they begged him to place his hand on the man. ³³ After he took him aside, away from the crowd, Jesus put his fingers into the man's ears. Then he spit and touched the man's tongue. ³⁴ He looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him, "Ephphatha!" (which means, "Be opened!"). ³⁵ At this, the man's ears were opened, his tongue was loosened and he began to speak plainly. ³⁶ Jesus commanded them not to tell anyone. But the more he did so, the more they kept talking about it. ³⁷ People were overwhelmed with amazement. "He has done everything well," they said. "He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak."

Islamic uprisings, national drought, the global economic crisis, modern immorality . . . with all these major problems in the world, should we be praying for God's undivided attention to heal our colds and flus, help us find a job, or soothe the hurt of a broken relationship? With all that is going on in the world, is it right for us to expect God's undivided attention regarding the insignificant problems we face?

The answer is yes – but not because we are so important or because our problems are unbearable. The answer is yes because this is the kind of love God has for us. You are not just another number on this earth. You are a precious soul he purchased with his blood, a child he washed clean and adopted through baptism. Through faith, the LORD is your heavenly Father. Jesus is your brother, and as such he gives you his full attention – even while he is busy directing all the affairs of this world.

Let us consider Jesus' personal care for us under the theme: **Jesus takes us aside:** 1) *To heal us physically.* 2) *To heal us spiritually.*

Part One: To heal us physically.

Our text begins: *Then Jesus left the vicinity of Tyre and went through Sidon, down to the Sea of Galilee and into the region of the Decapolis.* ³² *There some people brought to him a man who was deaf and could hardly talk, and they begged him to place his hand on the man.*

I find it interesting that this deaf man *was brought* Jesus. The deaf can get around quite well on their own. He didn't need to be brought to Jesus, but he was. Why? Could it be that he was afraid? I can just imagine the friends of this deaf man telling him that Jesus is in town - that now is his chance to be healed. I can picture his reluctance to see Jesus – either due to his inability to communicate, or doubts as to whether Jesus could or would help him. So what do his friends do? They bring him to Jesus and plead on his behalf.

Brothers and sisters in Christ: Be like the friends of the deaf man in our account. Bring the sick to Jesus by praying for them. Show your love for those who are suffering and hurting by praying for them. Sometimes your friends are too scared to pray for themselves because the devil is plaguing them with all kinds of doubts. It is especially at times like these that you need to be like the friends of the deaf man and ask Christ to help them.

After [Jesus] took him aside, away from the crowd, Jesus put his fingers into the man's ears. Then he spit and touched the man's tongue. ³⁴ *He looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him, "Ephphatha!" (which means, "Be opened!").*

Let us consider - step by step - what Jesus did. He was not in the healing business for personal fame, so the first thing Jesus did is take the man aside – away from the crowd. Just imagine how much that meant to the deaf man: Jesus considered him of such importance, that he stopped what he was doing and turned away from the crowd he was ministering to, so that he could care for this deaf man: one on one.

Take note of this, dear Christian: your relationship with Jesus is not one in which you are saved merely because you belong to the mass of people Jesus died for. Jesus knows and loves you as an individual. You can go to him at any time with any problem, and he will give you his full attention. God actually listens to your prayers better than you pray them! But this does not mean that He will solve your problem right away. You see - like an expert counselor – Jesus may slowly help you so that can learn through the process of what you experience. But don't let this truth cause you to doubt whether or not he heard your pleas. The Almighty King of heaven and earth gives you nothing less than his full attention, and that is something amazing!

The next thing Jesus did - after taking the deaf man away from the crowd – was communicate to him what he was going to do. He put his fingers in the man's ears, informing him that he was about to unplug them. Jesus spit on his finger and touched the man's tongue – maybe to indicate that from his own mouth would come the words that would heal the man. Then Jesus looked up to heaven – showing the man where his help was really coming from - and with a deep sigh said: "*Ephphatha!*" (which means, "*Be opened!*")

At this, the man's ears were opened, his tongue was loosened and he began to speak plainly. There is power in Jesus' Words. When Jesus speaks, things happen. He explained to the man exactly how he would heal him and then he did it: proving that he is the Messiah.

If Jesus has power to make the deaf hear, then he certainly has power to help us when we are sick or in need. Now the healing he provides us with may not be as dramatic as what he did for the deaf man, but he still does it. I know this personally. When I was 4 years old I had meningitis so bad that I temporarily went blind. When I was taken to the hospital, my parents did not know if I would live. They prayed for me. The next morning the doctor said I was alive, but warned my parents that I might have brain damage. They prayed for me. And here I stand today.

I am sure that all of you – whether you know it or not - have a story of how God healed you in some way. These stories might not seem “miraculous.” Worldly minded people might say that we are merely “lucky” - or that the medical community pulled through and did its job. But Christians know that healing and health are never a matter of luck. Jesus heals us behind the scenes – working with the medical community – to grant us healing. But make no mistake – every healing, whether it be simply a cold taking its course or a person whose cancer miraculously disappears, is from our gracious Lord who cares for us deeply. He personalizes his care for us – not only to heal us physically, but also in order to address our greatest need: healing from sin.

Part Two: He heals us spiritually

Our text continues: ³⁶ *Jesus commanded them not to tell anyone. But the more he did so, the more they kept talking about it.* Now why did Jesus command the people not to tell anyone about the miracle? Didn't he want people to know that he is the Messiah who was to come to take away the sins of the world? Yes he did, and this is the very reason for the command. You see, the people focused so much on what Jesus was doing, that they failed to listen to what Jesus was saying. When the crowds looked at Jesus most of them thought they were looking at a mere prophet – a miracle worker who made them feel good. Only Peter and the other disciples confessed that He was the true Christ – the Son of God who was to come into the world to give us true spiritual healing. This is what Jesus wanted the people to focus on. This is what he wants us to focus on as well, so let us look at how healing of the deaf man serves as a good illustration of the spiritual healing from sin God granted all of us.

Like the deaf man, we were born with a problem: We were born deaf to God. Sin and unbelief plugged our ears and prevented us from understanding and accepting God's Word. And, according to our sinful nature, we were reluctant to go to Jesus.

But then someone brought us to Jesus. Maybe it was your parents who brought you to the baptismal font or a dear friend who told you the good news about Jesus. And when you were brought to Jesus, he took you away from the crowd of this world, and opened your ears by the power of His Word. Through his messengers, Jesus told you how he paid for all of your sins on the cross, how he loves you, and how – through faith in this good news - you will have eternal life.

Jesus spoke his great “Ephphatha” to us when we heard him say: “Believe in me.” At that moment we could hear Jesus speak. We could understand him. We could follow him. But Jesus not only opened our ears to his salvation, he has also opened our mouths and loosed our tongues so that we can tell others, clearly and correctly, all that Jesus has done for us.

Jesus does not command us to be silent. He wants us to speak about His salvation. He wants us to speak clearly. It is certainly okay to rejoice in the earthly blessings and miracles God has done in your life, but don't speak of these too much. Be even more excited and tell people more about how Jesus is the Christ. Tell them how he healed you spiritually, how he opened your ears to listen, your mind to understand, your heart to believe, and your mouth to proclaim. Be like the friends of the deaf man, and bring others to Jesus, just as you yourself were brought to him. Amen.