

St Luke's Evangelical Lutheran Church – Watertown, WI
Pastor Mark Gartner
Sermon for Pentecost 16 – September 13th and 16th, 2012

Mark 7:31-37

Then Jesus left the vicinity of Tyre and went through Sidon, down to the Sea of Galilee and into the region of the Decapolis. 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.

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. He looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him, "Ephphatha!" (which means, "Be opened!"). At this, the man's ears were opened, his tongue was loosened and he began to speak plainly.

Jesus commanded them not to tell anyone. But the more he did so, the more they kept talking about it. People were overwhelmed with amazement. "He has done everything well," they said. "He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak."

Dear Children of our heavenly Father,

As a pastor you get to visit with some very nice people. I remember one of those visits. I had a conversation with a 90+ year-old shut-in that gave me a different perspective on the world. He recounted the things he had seen in his life-span to me. He spoke of riding in horse and buggy, and then gave a run down some of the cars he had owned and what wonderful innovations things a heater for the occupants were.

Things that are now taken for granted were once wonders that could take a person's breath away. I'm a "little" -- little being in quotations since I am not really all too old, older now and I have even seen things that have changed in my short lifetime. There were the launches of the Space Shuttles and that program is now done. There has been the invention of the computer. Computers that sit on your desk are more powerful than whole rooms full of equipment from years ago. Not so long ago if you saw a person with a car-phone you assumed they were rich, today it is harder to find someone who doesn't own a cell phone than those who do. They are everywhere. I have to ask you:

Sermon Theme: Does Anything Amaze You Anymore?

- 1. The depth of our sinfulness should amaze us**
- 2. The power of God's grace is truly amazing**

These days there isn't much left we find amazing. Perhaps the events in the gospel today should be, but we live in the 21st century where modern medicine has found ways to deal with such infirmities. People who are hard of hearing have tiny hearing aids; some almost invisible, they are so small and unobtrusive. Even people who are deaf aren't without hope, for cochlear implants can allow hearing for most of them. It wasn't that way for the friends of the deaf man in our text. They had heard about Jesus, but he wasn't the last hope for their friend; he was the only hope.

What *is* amazing to our modern ears is the ease with which Jesus restored the man's hearing. **"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. He looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him, "Ephphatha!" (which means, "Be opened!"). At this, the man's ears were opened, his tongue was loosened and he began to speak plainly."** As easily as God said "Let there be light" when he was creating the world, so also Jesus with only a word restored hearing to a deaf man. Not only that, there was no learning curve for the man to adapt to his new-found hearing; he was immediately able to speak plainly. Those who witnessed this event couldn't stop talking about it.

What is it that you can't stop talking about? Perhaps it's the loss of the Packers last week and the game against the Bear this week. Will the Brewers actually get into the playoffs? Who will be the next President

of the United States and why or why not. The killing of the Ambassador to Libya and what triggered it has certainly been a hot topic. Maybe it is the hot summer we had. These and many other topics might be things that we can't stop talking about. All kinds of things find their way into our conversations in the course of a day, but how often do you mention God? Why does it seem to be easy to keep our mouths shut about God? Perhaps we don't talk about him all that much because we have lost our sense of amazement. Maybe we take what he has to offer for granted; things like forgiveness and heaven.

The word translated "deaf" in our text can also be translated "dull" or "blunt." Has your faith become dull? A dull faith can convince itself it doesn't really need forgiveness all that much. It shows in your attitude. I've watched people young and old change their appearance in order to make themselves appear "cool" to their peers. While the different generations have different looks, the actions are similar: alcohol or drug abuse, sexual promiscuity and adopting a hateful outlook and attitude to some other group. A dull faith also shows itself in disrespect to parents and other authority figures. Such a desire to "do your own thing" rather than respecting authority ultimately means you disrespect God, who gave those representatives for your benefit. Faith which is blunted seems to have a problem with language, too. No self-respecting truck driver would want to have his peer group hear some of the things that come out of the mouths of those who call themselves Christian, yet sound like atheists.

A blunted faith which slides so easily into sin finds itself more and more infected by sinful thoughts and actions. Skip church once and it becomes easier to do it again. Miss your Bible reading or devotion today and then tomorrow and the next day, and it becomes harder and harder to pick that Bible up again and use it. Such spiritual bad habits, in fact, turn the study of God's Word from a joy into a chore. One's conscience is no longer bothered when faith is dull and lifeless. It doesn't take much for spiritual deafness to manifest itself in spiritual muteness. You aren't going to talk about God if God has become unimportant to you.

2. The power of God's grace is truly amazing

When that happens, there's only one place to go — Jesus. That's where the deaf man's friends took him. **"Then Jesus left the vicinity of Tyre and went through Sidon, down to the Sea of Galilee and into the region of the Decapolis. 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."** They begged Jesus to just place his hand on the man. They knew he could help. He did. A crowd can be intimidating when you have a handicap, especially when your friends have singled you out and you have become the center of attention. Notice that Jesus dealt with the man's personal circumstances. He took him aside from the crowd to alleviate any anxiety. Since the man couldn't hear what he was saying, he made clear what was going on with his gestures. The man immediately knew what the results were, for he could hear and speak!

Jesus worked a miracle on the deaf and mute man through his all-powerful Word. He still works in people's lives through his Word today. Dull and blunted faith needs to be polished and sharpened. Jesus gave personal attention to the faith of the deaf man and he does the same for you. It's amazing to realize how many people hear the same sermon, but each takes something a little bit different away from it! The Lord works personally in each heart to strengthen and build you up — to polish your faith in just the way you need.

Have you ever noticed that you won't find books on how to be mediocre on the shelves in the bookstore or library? What people really need are books on how to better themselves; instinctively the sinful self slips into the mediocrity of evil behavior. That's why so many motivational speakers have sprung up — they teach people to work to better themselves. Christians need to be reminded of their sins, but only so they don't become too smug about their supposed superiority. Each of us needs to be reminded that we are not only mediocre, but evil — not to send us deeper into depression, but to prepare our hearts for the relief of the gospel. Here you get something far better than motivational speaking; you get the comfort and assurance that Jesus has seen the sins that plague you and has paid for them. Your poorly-made choices of the past have been supplanted with the perfect choices Jesus made for you.

God knows what you need; he knows what other Christians need. That's why the writer to the Hebrews

says: **“Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another” (Hebrews 10:25).** Each of us is lifted up and built up by fellow worshipers; just as we lift up and build those around us. Join a Bible class. Being a Christian doesn’t just mean sitting in a pew like a sponge and soaking things up, it includes examining the Scriptures to learn and grow for yourself.

To the deaf and mute man Jesus said: “be opened.” Through his Word he speaks “be opened” to you, as well. His law exposes your spiritual deafness. It lays bare the sins that dull you which we talked about earlier and many, many others, too numerous to mention. That law sharpens your conscience; it makes you understand the consequences of your sin — eternal damnation in hell. “Be opened” Jesus says to you, and your sin-dulled ears are opened to hear the good news of his love and forgiveness. His story is an amazing story. It’s a story of a manger and a cross and an empty tomb. It’s a story about the amazing love of God for you; love that was not willing to leave you hopeless, but to give you hope— real hope, sure hope.

Through his Word, the Lord Jesus is able to amaze us when no one else can. Hearing and reading in Scripture the great things God has done for his people opens our ears and eyes to see the amazing things Jesus did in his death and resurrection and continues to do in our lives. People right in our midst have found employment even in the midst of a deep recession; they have felt the Lord’s healing touch through the hands of physicians gifted to serve this community; they have received strength from the Lord to bear up under the burdens of unemployment or loss of loved ones or other difficulties in life.

Even more amazing— most amazing of all, in fact— is what is yet to come. With earth-bound eyes and ears we can only try to imagine the things that will amaze us when we enter our Savior’s presence in heaven one day. The people who had brought the deaf man to Jesus were so amazed that their tongues were also loosed. **“People were overwhelmed with amazement. “He has done everything well,” they said. “He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak.”** They couldn’t stop talking about what they had seen Jesus do. Open your eyes and ears of faith; realize the great things the Lord has done for you and you will be amazed. You won’t be able to stop talking about the Lord Jesus.

God is doing amazing things in our lives. They are far more significant and important than the marvels of modern technology. What he has done for us means we have an eternal future. He says “Ephphatha” to you and me. Your eyes and ears have been opened to be amazed. Now he will also unloose your tongue to tell the world what great things God has done. Amen.