

16th Sunday after Pentecost
“God-given hearing and speaking” (Mark 7:31-34)
September 8, 2024
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Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, our text for the Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost is from our Gospel reading, Mark 7:31-34

“31 Again, departing from the region of Tyre and Sidon, He came through the midst of the region of Decapolis to the Sea of Galilee. 32 Then they brought to Him one who was deaf and had an impediment in his speech, and they begged Him to put His hand on him. 33 And He took him aside from the multitude, and put His fingers in his ears, and He spat and touched his tongue. 34 Then, looking up to heaven, He sighed, and said to him, “Ephphatha,” that is, “Be opened.”

So far our text.

A man was brought to Jesus who lived in a world of silence. He was unable to hear and unable to speak. The military has a term for that – radio silence – a ceasing all communication. Sometimes it’s called “going dark”. All public conversation ceases but private encrypted channels are then used.

For the poor man who was brought to Jesus, he had no public or private communication. He was just in the dark, a world of silence. Of course, such a world is not what God ever intended. When God created Adam and Eve, they were created perfectly, and all their senses worked perfectly. Their communication with God and each other was perfect, having been created holy in God’s image. They enjoyed all the sounds of the animals of creation. There was never a cross word spoken between Adam and Eve.

But there came a time of radio silence, of going dark... because of their disobedience. **“And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden.” Genesis 3:8**

Why? Because the sound of God's voice now caused them fear. **"⁹ Then the Lord God called to Adam and said to him, "Where *are* you?" ¹⁰ So he said, "I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself."**

How do we act before God because of our sins? Silence? Groaning? We can relate to David in Psalm 31 where he wrote:

"Have mercy on me, O Lord, for I am in trouble; My eye wastes away with grief, Yes, my soul and my body! ¹⁰ For my life is spent with grief, And my years with sighing; My strength fails because of my iniquity, And my bones waste away."

Sighing... That's the sound that is heard from a troubled sinner. It's our sound that we know too well because of our iniquity.

It was the sound that Jesus made when He took the deaf/mute man aside. Jesus looked up into heaven – for in heaven there is no loss of the senses and there is no sin. And from heaven comes help for every sinner. So, Jesus sighed as He confronted what shouldn't be.

I asked the students in chapel what makes them sigh, as we heard this same story. Homework was the quick answer. Hey, they're being honest! Youth like to chillax, as they say, when they get home. Homework, well, it gets done with a little sighing.

There was a collective sigh of grief this week from parents of school children as we heard the sad news of the loss of life in a high school in Atlanta. We pray that our children will come home safely to do their homework and most especially spend time with the family.

There are many sighs that we experience throughout the day as we hear the news of tragedies and evil throughout the world...as we hear of threats and police patrolling the high schools in Donna. **"Have mercy on me, O Lord,"** we each plea with David.

And Jesus does. For Jesus doesn't just sigh, but He reverses the cause of sighing. He touches the ears and tongue of the deaf/mute man, breaks radio silence and says, "Ephphatha" – be opened! And the world of darkness becomes alive with sound – the sound of the Savior's voice! The sound of the people **"astonished beyond measure,**

saying, “He has done all things well. He makes both the deaf to hear and the mute to speak.”

Indeed Jesus, the Son of God, does all things well! For He has opened heaven itself by His death and resurrection. What was closed to us because of our sin He has opened! Remember what Jesus said to Nathanael in John 1 as soon as He called him to be His disciple.

“Because I said to you, ‘I saw you under the fig tree,’ do you believe? You will see greater things than these.” 51 And He said to him, “Most assuredly, I say to you, hereafter you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.”

And so David’s sighing ceases as God restores him.

“Blessed be the Lord, for He has shown me His marvelous kindness in a strong city! 22 For I said in my haste, “I am cut off from before Your eyes”; Nevertheless You heard the voice of my supplications when I cried out to You.”

What does David then say to all of us when we are filled with grief and sighing?
23 Oh, love the Lord, all you His saints! For the Lord preserves the faithful, And fully repays the proud person. 24 Be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart, all you who hope in the Lord.”

So as we have been going through this seventh chapter of Mark, we hear Jesus urging all people to listen to His life giving Word.

“Hear Me, everyone, and understand... 16 If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear!”

We’ve heard these past Sundays that our salvation cannot be achieved by keeping man’s Pharisaical commandments and traditions. External washings do not break the radio silence of man’s sin. Only the life-giving washing of baptism restores the soul. So, when Jesus was baptized, God the Father showed the world that His Son was placing Himself under the law for all people, to keep the law in our stead. Heaven opened and the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus as a dove. And the Father broke radio silence and said, **“17 And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” Matthew 3:16.**

Yes, God did not keep silent after Adam and Eve sinned but promised them His Son Jesus. He told the serpent how God would save all mankind through the woman's Seed. **"15 And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel."** Genesis 3:15
So we heard this prophecy repeated in our Old Testament lesson from Isaiah 35.
"4 Say to those who are fearful-hearted, "Be strong, do not fear! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God; He will come and save you."
5 Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped.

Jesus does all things well! He gave His life for all people, Jews and Gentiles alike. The Syro-Phoenician woman believed this and her daughter's dark demon-controlled world was broken with the light of God! Just a crumb of God's gracious Word of promise!

God's powerful Word comes to our ears this morning. And through it God takes away all sighing. What does Romans 10 tell us?

"The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith which we preach): 9 that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation."

God's saving Word is for all people, Paul continues:

"1 For the Scripture says, "Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame." 12 For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. 13 For "whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."

God takes each of us aside and touches our hearts with His Word and saves us. **"faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."** Romans 10:17

So we just sang:

*How sweet the name of Jesus sound
In a believer's ear!
It soothes our sorrows, heals our wounds,
And drives away our fear.*

And in great love, Jesus not only gives to us His Word, but takes us aside personally and with His Word seals our faith with the life-giving water of our Baptism! In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit our ears hear that we are washed of our sin and heirs of the Kingdom of God. Jesus does all things well!

And He instituted His gracious Sacrament of the Altar to take each believer aside personally and give His very body and blood in with and under the bread and wine. He speaks to our ears this promise – “Take and eat this is My body given for you. Take and drink this is My blood shed for you for the remission of sins.” Jesus removes our sighing and does all things well!

He has opened our ears to hear and believe. And He has opened our mouths to speak of His gracious promises to all people. For faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God as you and I speak it to our family, our friends and all people. And the Holy Spirit continues to break radio silence and worlds of darkness with the Good News of Jesus the Savior, crucified and risen from the open tomb, who will come again, and open the tombs of all believers, and take them to heaven for all eternity. Jesus does all things well! Amen.

“And this peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” Amen. (Philippians 4:7)