

# THE TWELFTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

MARK 7:31-37

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

*And looking up into heaven,  
Jesus groaned and said to the deaf mute,  
“Ephphatha,”  
which is,  
“Be opened.”  
And his ears were opened,  
and the fetter of his tongue was loosed,  
and he spoke rightly.<sup>1</sup>*

“O LORD, open my lips, and my mouth will declare Your praise” (Ps. 51:15). So begins the service of Matins, which we do with some regularity here at Our Redeemer. Before we utter a single word of praise, we make our petition to God for help, to open our lips and loosen our tongues, so that we may then, and only then, declare His praise. Why do we do that? For the same reason they brought to Jesus a man who was deaf and had a speech impediment in today’s Gospel lesson:

**We have a problem, and it’s one only Jesus can solve.**

The report of Jesus had spread far and wide. Even those in the northern Gentile region of Tyre and Sidon had heard of Him. Whether or not they believed *in* Jesus, they believed He could help. So they asked Him: “O Lord, open his lips.”

It’s hard to imagine what life must have been like for this man. Not having a sense of smell is one thing.<sup>2</sup> But to not be able to hear *or* speak? To be so completely cut off from other people and the world around him? How truly awful that must have been.

In a way, though, it’s not hard to imagine, because that is what we are *all* like by nature: deaf to God’s Word and dumb in our praise. This man is *us*. We have, as it were, an impediment of our own, our sin making us just as unable to hear, and the devil our tongues unable to speak. In thought, word, and deed, we are bound, fettered and chained like a prisoner, silenced and cut off from God and His Word.

And the *reason* this is a problem is because of what we heard in today’s Epistle: “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved” (Rom. 10:9). But how can we *do* that if it’s

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<sup>1</sup> Pastor Douthwaite Version (PDV)

<sup>2</sup> Fun fact: I don’t.

true that we cannot by our own understanding and effort believe in Jesus Christ our Lord, or confess Him? Or, to put it in the words of the apostle Paul, “how are they to call on Him in whom they have not believed?”

Again, that’s why they brought him to *Jesus*. They knew of no cure in the world but Christ. And yet, Christ came into the world to save *sinners*, not to heal every disease. He Himself says to His disciples, having spent an entire evening healing many who were sick, “Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out” (Mark 1:34-38). And so, much like the paralytic, who was lowered down through the roof by his friends to be healed by Jesus and received forgiveness instead, this man’s sickness was merely a *symptom*. Which is why, later on, Jesus charges the crowd to tell no one: He wants to be known for the sign of Jonah, His resurrection, by which death itself is destroyed, not simply His ability to slap on a Band-Aid.

Still, Jesus can’t seem to help Himself. When He meets a poor, miserable sinner in need—a blind man on the side of the road, a close friend who has died, or a man who is deaf and has a speech impediment—Jesus has mercy. He *groans*. He doesn’t like what sin has done to His sheep, and therefore, He jumps into action. He comes to our aid.

Because Jesus cares. He cares for *you*. He is not like the priest or the Levite, passing by on the other side; He’s your Good Samaritan, compassionate, suffering *with* you, who died and were imprisoned through one man’s trespass. But now you have been brought by your parents, your pastors, your friends, to the Great Physician, the Healer of our souls. And thank God for that!

But how does He do it? *How* does He apply His saving work on the cross to our deaf ears and our mute tongue?

### **He speaks.**

Not very impressive, is it? Maybe even downright disappointing. But, effective: “Ephphatha. Be opened.’ And his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly.” Christ’s Word has *power*: power to heal, power to justify, power to create *ex nihilo*, out of nothing, power to raise even the dead to life.

*We* were dead, and yet by His grace we live. Christ speaks His powerful Ephphatha to us in His Word. He casts the seed of His victory over sin and death into our ears and causes it to take root and grow. Faith is the gift of God that comes through hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ (Rom. 10:17). So *that’s* how we are to believe in Him: through the Gospel, the power of God for salvation, a light in the darkness, a lifeline to the lost.

*He* speaks, and then *we* do, “*rightly*,” just like the deaf mute. The translation in your bulletin reads “plainly,” but it’s not just that he was able to be understood; his speech itself was *orthodox*, it was “right praise” of the One who broke the darkness. Thus were fulfilled the words of the Isaiah (29:22-23):

Jacob shall no more be ashamed,  
     no more shall his face grow pale.  
 For when he sees his children,  
     the work of My hands, in his midst,  
     they will sanctify My name;  
 they will sanctify the Holy One of Jacob  
     and will stand in awe of the God of Israel.

“Hallowed be Thy name,” we pray in the First Petition of the Lord’s Prayer. God’s name is certainly holy in itself, but we pray in this petition that it may be kept holy among us also. This is done, in part, when the Word of God is taught in its truth and purity; when it is confessed *rightly*. “Help us to do this, dear Father in heaven!”

And when He does, when the Lord opens our lips,

**We simply cannot do otherwise.**

“My mouth *will* declare Your praise.” The faith of the heart *explodes* in doxology, as uncontainable as Christ’s body was in the tomb. No wonder the more Jesus charged them to tell no one, the more zealously they proclaimed it! They stood in awe of not just some miracle worker, but *Christ*, the Son of God, our Lord and living Synecdoche, a single, perfect man representing the whole of sinful humanity. “For as by the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous” (Romans 5:19).

“With the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved” (Rom. 10:10). And *both* are gifts of God, delivered by the means of Word and Sacrament. This is where God is for you. This is where He takes you aside and opens your ears again and again, reminding You of His great love for you in Christ Jesus. This is where He forgives your sin, freeing you from the chains of your guilt and unbelief.

Praise the One who breaks the darkness! He has done all things well. He even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak.

In ☩ Jesus’ name. Amen.

*Soli Deo gloria*

**Questions for Reflection:**

- Why do we ask God to “open our lips”?
- In what ways are we like the deaf mute?
- Why did Jesus come into the world?
- How does Jesus apply His saving work to us?
- What happens as a result of hearing and believing the Gospel?