

EPHPHATHA! BE OPENED!

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Old Testament Lesson; Isaiah 35:4-7

Epistle Lesson; James 1:17-27

Sermon Text; Mark 7:31-37

The text or scripture reading that we will look at today is taken from the holy Gospel of Mark, chapter seven, verses 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.”

These are Your Words, Heavenly Father. Lead us in the way of truth. Your Word is truth.

Amen

There was a retired gentleman who was at the doctor's office. While he was there he thought he would just get a little advice from the doctor. He said, "Doc, I think my wife is pretty hard of hearing and I wonder what I should do about it."

The doctor said, "Well, before we figure out what to do about it, let's try to figure out how hard of hearing your wife really is. So what I want you to do is go home. When your wife's back is turned to you, say something to her. Ask her a question. If she does not respond, get a little closer, and again, ask her a question. If she does not respond, get a little closer, and ask her the question, again, until she hears what you say and she responds to you. Then, come back and we will talk about what kind of hearing loss she has."

And so, the gentleman drove home, walked through the front door of the house, and he could see that his wife was in the kitchen with her back to him, as she working at the sink. So, he thought, "*Well, here is my opportunity.*" So he asked, "Honey, what's for supper?" No response. He took a few steps closer and said, "Honey, what's for supper?" No response. He took a few steps closer, and he said, "Honey, what's for supper?" No response. He counted and he had stepped forward ten different times and she still hadn't responded to him. Finally, he was right behind her. He stepped forward his eleventh time, put his hand on her shoulder, and asked, "Honey, what's for supper?"

She turned around, she looked at him, and said, "**Well, for the eleventh time, meatloaf!**"

So, who was the one who was hard of hearing!?!

Our hearing is a wonderful gift from God. Think about the ears that God has given us, and what it would be like, if we could not hear.

What would that be like to be in total silence?

•What if you could not hear your mother's voice, when you were

just a little baby, the comforting voice of your mother, but it was just silence?

•What if you couldn't hear the people who love you say to you, "I love you"? Nothing but silence.

•What if you couldn't hear the train whistle or the warning of the sirens? How much more dangerous your life would be.

•What if you couldn't hear the teacher in the classroom to instruct you?

•What if you couldn't hear the laughter and the fun of your friends?

•What if you could not hear the Word of God?

Faith comes from hearing the message
and the message is heard through the Word of Christ.

•What if you couldn't hear the crescendo of voices, as we say the Creeds together, confessing our faith together in Christ? What would it be like to be in total silence?

•What if you could not hear the beauty of music and the beauty of hymns, as we sing to God?

What a gift the sense of hearing is and what it would be like, if we could not hear.

Or, what would it be like, if you could not speak? What a gift it is to be able to use our mouths, our voices, our tongues.

•But, what if you could not tell somebody, "I love you"?

•What if you were in need and you couldn't express or explain to somebody what need you had?

•What if you had a wonderful day, but you couldn't use your mouth to explain to the people you love, the day you had?

•What if you couldn't tell somebody, who needed to know that Jesus loves them?

What would your world would be like, if you couldn't hear, if you couldn't use the tongue that God had given you?

And so, in today's text, we find some men who had a friend who was

not able to hear and he was not able to speak plainly. Their hearts went out to him. They wanted his world to be open for him. They, in faith, took this man to Jesus. They begged Jesus to heal the man. Jesus, in His great heart of compassion, took this man aside, away from the crowd. I want you to see the sign language that Jesus used, to show this man what was about to happen, to prepare him for what was about to happen. Now remember, this man was in absolute silence. He maybe didn't even know who Jesus was. He saw the crowd, but he didn't know why they were gathered there. He saw Jesus, but he probably didn't know who Jesus was. He was not able to hear. It was all just silence to him. He didn't know what Jesus was about to do. Who could explain it to him? And so, Jesus took this man aside, away from the crowd. The Bible says "Jesus put His fingers into the man's ears". Now, that is sign language for that man. (What was Jesus telling that man?) Then, He took some spit from His tongue and He touched the man's tongue with His finger. (What was He telling that man, by that sign language? "*I am about to heal you.*") And then, Jesus let out a sigh. That was a sigh of compassion. Jesus then looked up to Heaven. That was a sign to the man that this healing was not from some human power, but this is divine power from Heaven, itself. After that man had been in silence all of this time, the voice, the mighty voice of God, which can rend the mountains asunder, which can call forth the dead from the grave (and will do that one day for all of us), which called this world into existence, **the voice of God spoke**. That man's silence was shattered, as he heard the voice of Jesus say,

"Ephphatha!

Be opened!"

That man's ears were opened and he was able to hear! The Bible says "his tongue was loosened and he began to speak plainly". The message we receive from that is certainly that Jesus is God in the flesh and that His Word is all powerful. And, His Word is even

able to make the deaf to hear and the mute to speak!

**That same Jesus
is speaking today,
through His Word!**

You know, back in Jesus' day, there were a lot of people who gathered around Him, including the Pharisees and the Teachers of the Law. Jesus spoke. **Jesus is God.** The Word of God went out from His mouth and it went into the sound waves. Those sound waves struck those people's outer ears. Their ears collected those sound waves. It went into their middle ear and it struck their eardrum. Their eardrum sent it into their inner ear, which sent it to their brain. And, their brains understood the words that were spoken, put definition to those words, and put together the sentences. So, the people heard the Word of God.

And yet, there were many of them who remained deaf to the Word. Jesus said, "You are always hearing, but never listening." The Bible tells us there are people who stopped up their ears, so that even though they heard the Word, they were deaf, spiritually, and did not want to hear what Jesus was really saying. The Bible even tells us and predicts that in the end, in the last days, there will be people who turn their ears away from the truth to hear whatever their itching ears want to hear.

And so, the Bible describes our natural, spiritual condition as people who are deaf to the Word of God.

- Our sinful nature wants to plug up its ears to the Word.
- Our sinful nature doesn't want to hear that we are sinners.
- Our sinful nature wants to put its finger in its ear, and say, "*I don't hear that.*"
- Our sinful nature doesn't want to hear that there is only one way that we can be saved. We can't save ourselves, but we must be saved by someone else.
- Our sinful nature wants to use our ears in ways that are

inappropriate.

•Our sinful nature doesn't want to be quick to listen. It wants to be quick to hear one side of the story and then judge, and use our ears in improper ways.

•Our sinful nature is not eager to come to church to hear the Word of God. It would be happy to stay away and not hear the Word of God in its ears.

•Our sinful nature would be happy to hear all kinds of gossip and listen to bad things about other people. Our sinful nature is eager for that.

Our sinful nature also wants to use our tongues in inappropriate ways.

•Our sinful nature is eager to spread slander, with this tongue and to spread gossip, with this tongue.

•Our sinful nature is eager to say things about other people's reputation that does not help them nor benefit them.

•Our sinful nature is eager to get into arguments, to get into fights, to defend itself, with its tongue.

When we look at our use of the ears and the mouths that God has given us, every one of us in this room needs to acknowledge, *“I am a sinner. I need to be healed, just like this man in today's scripture reading needed to be healed, I need to be healed of the way I use my ears and the way I use my tongue.”* Thank the LORD, our Lord Jesus has come for that very purpose. He has come to heal us.

You have probably heard the story of the young man who was literally born with no ears. His parents were very concerned about him. When he went to school, his classmates would tease him and make fun of him. His hearing was never very good, because all he had were two little holes in the side of his head.

His parents asked the doctor if there was some way he could get ears attached. The doctor said “We can do that, but not until he is full grown. And we will have to find a donor who is willing to give their

ears to your son.” And so, these parent's hearts went out to their son. Finally, when he was a senior in high school the doctor said, “Now your son is physically mature enough that we can look for a donor, who will give him ears.” And so the boy was eager, and the parents were eager. But, all through his senior year in high school, there was never a donor who would give him ears.

When he went off to college, his parents were very concerned about what would happen in college. Now, he was on his own. Would he be made fun of? Would he be able to hear what was going on in the classroom?

About a week later, that boy got a phone call from his dad. His dad said, “Come home, immediately! We have found a donor for you, so you can have ears!” The boy went home and that very night he had surgery, and ears were attached! He went back to college and he was able to hear and his appearance was better. He was so happy he had ears!

About a half year later, he got another phone call from his dad. His dad said, “Son, you are going to have to come home. Your mother has been killed in a tragic car accident. You have to come home for the funeral. She has gone to Heaven.”

And so, the boy went home. There he saw his mom, laying in the casket. He was lovingly brushing her hair with his hands, when all of a sudden he pulled her hair away from where her ear was and her ear was gone. He then realized that she was the one who had donated her ears. She sacrificed her ears for him.

Your Savior, Jesus, has done far more than that for you. He not only gave up His ears, He gave up His eyes, His hands, and His feet. Our Savior sacrificed His body to purchase your ears, your eyes, your hands, your entire body, with His body - your soul, with His soul. He bore your sins in His body on the tree. The good news is that you are forgiven, because of what Jesus has done for you. Jesus is here, with His Word, to speak to your soul those healing words,

“Be opened. Be opened!”

Your heart hears the Gospel Message,

“Faith comes from hearing the message
and the message is heard through
the Word of Christ.”

Through that Gospel Message, our souls are healed. When you confess your sins, here on Sunday morning, and you hear the words of the pastor, when he says, “I declare unto you the gracious forgiveness of all of your sins,” those are not the words of a human being. The pastor does not have the power to forgive your sins. He is simply declaring an accomplished fact that Jesus wants you to know.

Your sins are forgiven.

And, through those words, that come into your ears, the Holy Spirit comforts you with peace that cannot come from anywhere else, when you hear the Word of God. When you come to the Lord's Supper, and you hear in your ears the words of Jesus to you, “This is my body and my blood, given for you for the forgiveness of your sins,” there, through those words, the Holy Spirit gives you faith. He strengthens your faith. He comforts you, with sins forgiven. Think about this. Jesus touched that man's tongue with His finger. Today, when you come to the Lord's Supper, He is going to touch your tongue with His body and with His blood - the very body that died on the cross! The very blood that purchased you is going to be on your tongue and on your lips, as a guarantee that what happened on the cross happened for you. And it is your possession. So here we hear with our ears the saving Gospel Message. And with our tongues we receive the body and blood of Christ. You go home today with ears that are justified, with tongues that are justified. That means your ears are declared not guilty, for Christ's sake. God doesn't hold against you any sins that have been committed with your ears or with your tongue. In His eyes, you are not guilty. You

are forgiven, for Christ's sake. Someday you are going to be in Heaven, with tongues that speak nothing but blessing, with ears that do nothing but hear what they are to hear. They will be holy. So, here is a question. What are you going to do with that justified tongue, this week? And, what are you going to do with your justified ears, this week? Let's go home committed to use them in a consecrated way. Let's go home committed to using our ears to be quick to listen, as the book of James tells us today, quick to listen to the needs of others around us, and use them in a God-pleasing way. Let's go home committed to using this tongue to speak the truth in love and to use it in a way that is pleasing to God. Particularly, let's listen to the needs, the spiritual needs, of those around us. And when we hear that with our ears, let's be quick to use our tongues in a way to build them up with the message of Christ.

•If you hear someone around you who is feeling that they have failed, speak to them the Gospel message, that no matter how far they have fallen, no matter what they have done, they have victory through Christ, who has forgiven them of all of their sins and washed them clean. And tell them He accepts them, for Christ's sake.

•If you hear of someone, with your ears, who is suffering from brokenness in a relationship, use your tongue to speak to them the Gospel message that even if the whole world were to forsake them, God will never forsake them. He sent His own dear Son to restore a relationship and has purchased them. He will never leave them or forsake them, for Christ's sake.

•If you know someone who has suffered some terrible thing, something terrible has happened to them, use your tongue to speak the saving Gospel message that our God loves them so much that He shares the victory over the worst things – sin, death, and the devil. He shares it with them, for Christ's sake. He will work all things out for their good.

•If you know someone who is facing death. You hear that with your ears. With your tongue, speak to them the message of eternal salvation in Christ and resurrection from the dead.

Thank God for our ears. Thank God for our tongues. Thank God we are forgiven for our misuse of them. And let's go home, today, committed to use our ears and our tongues to God's glory!

Amen