

The Text: St. Mark 7:31-37

31 Then he returned from the region of Tyre and went through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis. 32 And they brought to him a man who was deaf and had a speech impediment, and they begged him to lay his hand on him. 33 And taking him aside from the crowd privately, he put his fingers into his ears, and after spitting touched his tongue. 34 And looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, “Ephphatha,” that is, “Be opened.” 35 And his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. 36 And Jesus charged them to tell no one. But the more he charged them, the more zealously they proclaimed it. 37 And they were astonished beyond measure, saying, “He has done all things well. He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak.”

The Sermon

Dear friends in Christ,

What occurs in the text. Its purpose. The Gospels record many of Christ’s miracles that he performed for us. Here we see him compassionately dealing with a poor deaf and mute man, healing from his sicknesses. By his miracles, the Gospels show us that Christ really was who he claimed to be: the Son of God, who has power over all things.

Christ’s miracles are not mere displays of power, but demonstrations of other spiritual truths. But the miracles of Christ were not mere displays of his power. Various world religions, even in Christ’s day, acknowledge the fact that God must be powerful. But Christ came to reveal a message and teaching that was unique from the various religions of men. So his evangelists, who recorded the life and works of Christ, by telling us of this miracle, surely want us to consider other important, spiritual truths.

Which truths this miracle reveals. And which truths are these? Look to the poor man in our text. Here we see ourselves. You and I, in a certain sense, are deaf and unable to speak. Look also to Christ, and how he heals the man. Here we see ourselves, again. You and I have been healed by Christ, so that we can hear and speak again.

That we were originally created to listen to God. We humans were meant to be creatures who listen. "We have two ears and one mouth so that we can listen twice as much as we speak," the saying goes. And the one that we were meant to listen to, was to God, our loving Father; to understand him, trust in him, and obey him.

That sin causes a man to close his ears to God and resist him. But because of sin, which lives inside of us, the disposition or force that drives us to do what is wrong, we do not fulfill God's intent for us. Listen to God? Man closes his ears to him. Understand God? Man thinks that what God says is false. Trust in God and obey him? Man runs away and rebels against him.

We see how true it is then, what St. Paul wrote in his epistle to the Romans: "The mind that is set on the flesh," that is, the mind that is oriented according man's natural desires and inclinations, "is hostile to God," that is, it does not want to listen to God. It opposes him and is his enemy.

And so in a certain sense, people really are not what they seem. In the world, we see that people have many natural gifts and abilities. They are smart, intelligent, rational, capable of critical thinking. But these gifts do not carry over to spiritual wisdom. A person's mind may seem free and full of wisdom externally; but internally, he is bound to sin, so that he opposes God in every way, unless the Spirit of God calls him.

As a consequence, sin causes a man to be unable to articulate the truth. And because a man naturally opposes God, he becomes unable to articulate the truth. True, as we have already said, man is capable of acknowledging certain universal truths about God, such as his power or greatness or might. But these truths do not save a man. These truths do not reveal *who* God is. They only reveal *what* God is. And the most pressing question on the conscience, if it wants to have peace and health, is *who* is God? Because man opposes God, he has no idea who he is. He has no idea what a person must believe or do to be saved.

This truth is manifest in the existence of many world religions. Think, for a moment, about the religious state of things. Who can count all of the world's religions? Who can name all of the doctrines that men claim can give a man

peace or happiness? Is not this all a result of the fact, that people, by themselves, cannot articulate spiritual truth? They are like a student who, because he does not know the answer to an essay question, fills up his paper with as many words as possible, to make it appear like he knows something.

So the Psalmist writes, Psalm 14: "The fool says there is no God. There is none who does good. There is none who understands or seeks after God." What powerful statements! Man does not listen to God and he cannot speak the truth.

That the gospel is not an empty story, but reverses these effects of sin. But all of that changes when a person hears the message of the Gospel. Because the Gospel is not a mere story of historical facts. It doesn't merely show us how we should live. It doesn't merely tell us about a man who died valiantly and unjustly for a cause he believed in. If it were, then the Gospel would be no different than a comic book story. No, the gospel of Christ, is a message that radically changes you. It takes you, who by nature do not know God is, who do not want to listen to God, who are unable to articulate the truth, so that *do* know who God is: the Father of Jesus Christ; and so that you *do* want to listen to God; and so that you *can* articulate the truth.

That the Holy Spirit renews the mind through the message of Christ. Because when you hear about the life of Christ, the reason for his life and for his death; when you hear that in Christ, heaven is opened to you, and the forgiveness of sins freely flows out to you; when you hear that in Christ, you are given the power to rise from the dead again, an amazing thing happens. The Holy Spirit takes your mind, naturally opposed to God, and convinces you that all of these things are true. That they are true, *not just factually historically, but true for you*. The Holy Spirit takes your heart, and convinces it of the Gospel, so that you say: everything that Christ won and obtained for humanity, belongs now to me, because he has promised it.

So that the renewed mind no longer opposes God, but happily listens to him. So the one who believes the Gospel has had his mind renewed. He now happily listens to the voice of his God, because he has received the promise of life and salvation from him. He has become like a child that runs gladly to the arms of his parent, because the child knows that there is peace and security.

That the Gospel enables a person to articulate spiritual truth. And listening to what God says, that person becomes able to articulate the truth. So we do every Sunday in the words of the Creed.

That articulating the truth is a highly necessary thing. And so that we do not think that articulating the truth, like we do in the Creed, is any insignificant thing, consider how necessary it really is. Is there a person that does not at times feel confused, sad, or depressed? And what better way is there to get out of such states, except by repeating a word that gives us direction, cheers our sadness, and makes us happy? Such are the words of the Creed. I believe that God is my Father; that his Son, Jesus Christ, has redeemed me again to his kingdom; that the Holy Spirit has renewed me and will raise me up to eternal life.

Why it is important to remind ourselves of our natural corruption by sin. So we have seen that we, by ourselves, are naturally deaf and unable to speak, but that Christ and his gospel have healed us. Now, before I close, I want to clarify something about our preaching about humankind's natural inabilities. It might be that, when a person hears that man is naturally opposed to God, unable of doing what is good, incapable of true understanding or speaking the truth, he might think Christianity to be an awfully *pessimistic* religion.

Let no one think that. It is far from the truth. We teach this, not to make a person despair that he is a human, but that he may receive the greatest glory of being a human. Because here's the thing: A person's freedom has begun when he senses and acknowledges his bondage. A person's life has begun when he realizes and acknowledges his death. A person's true hearing has begun when he discovers that he's deaf. His speech starts when he realizes he can't speak.

In short, *we gain everything when we lose everything*. When we acknowledge our inability to save ourselves, we receive the one who can truly save us. That's what Christ meant, when he said: if anyone would follow me, let him deny himself, that is, let him say "No!" of himself. No! By myself I do not know God or listen to him. No, by myself, I cannot articulate the truth what is. No, by myself I am lost.

Christ tells us to do this so that he may exalt and glorify us. So that we can say, “Yes! In Christ, I know God. Being saved by Christ, I now hear God’s voice. Being instructed by Christ, I now can articulate the truth, for my health and benefit.”

Realizing this gracious and loving work of God in Christ, which no man can comprehend or glorify enough, let us, like the amazed crowds in our text, say: “Christ does all things well.” May God grant us this by his Spirit. Amen.