

*As follows in Jesus' name:*

...And taking him aside from the crowd privately, He [Jesus] put his fingers into his ears, and after spitting touched his tongue. And looking up to heaven, He sighed and said to him, "Ephphatha," that is, "Be opened." And his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly.

... And they were astonished beyond measure, saying, "He has done all things well. He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak."<sup>(ESV)</sup>

*This is Your Word, heavenly Father; sanctify us in the truth, Your Word is Truth. Amen.* (John 17:17)

In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Today's Gospel starts off speaking about Jesus and His disciples returning from the region of Tyre.

So let's consider some of the context as St. Mark lays this account out for us.

A few chapters back, Jesus was being hounded by the crowds.

Word had gotten out that He was able to heal people, and so they flooded to Him their sick & lame.

Word had gotten out that He taught as one having authority, and so they thronged Him to listen.

But they were unrelenting crowds.

People in such constant/desperate need – all the time.

When 1 person left, another 2 or 3 would come.

Everyone needing and wanting to be near Him,

to have Him touch them, to listen to His gracious words.

But Jesus and His disciples needed some time apart from the crowds, too.

They all needed time to rest... for their bodies and their minds... and also for their hearts and souls.

They needed time for respite... to meditate and to pray.

Jesus needed time to teach His seminarians.

So they went up to Gentile territory, to the region of Tyre,

where the people weren't as familiar with Jesus' fame (though the Syro-Phoenician woman was).

So we pick up at our text and we find that Jesus has returned from His retreat in the region of Tyre and He has gone to the region of the Decapolis (that is Greek for "10 Cities" – SE corner of Galilee).

We are introduced to the deaf man with a speech impediment.

But the man wasn't alone.

It was his friends who brought him and interceded for him

(how could he have known who Jesus was and what He could do for him, or even where He was).

His friends had heard about Jesus and had asked Jesus to lay His hands on their deaf friend.

...

Now, in the Gospels we hear of lots of ways Jesus cared for people in their distress.

Sometimes, He searched them out, like the lame man at the pool of Bethsaida.

Sometimes, they cried out after Him, like the Syro-Phoenician woman.

Sometimes, He simply speaks a word & they were well, never having met them, even from miles away.

Sometimes, they simply touch the hem of His clothing and they were healed.

But consider the care that Jesus gave to this complete stranger... stranger at least humanly speaking.

He took the man aside from the crowd and gave him a private audience.  
Jesus didn't just lay His hands on the man, He put His fingers in the man's ears...  
He spit... and touched the man's tongue...  
Then He looked up to heaven... sighed (more literally "groaned")... and spoke to the man.

It was this word "Ephphatha" that the man's ears first heard  
and, perhaps more remarkably, understood, and, more remarkably still, were enabled to obey.  
With that Word of God, the man was now able to hear the other gracious Words of God.  
No longer did he need friends to hear about Jesus for him.  
Now he could hear Jesus for himself.  
No longer would he need friends to bring him to Jesus.  
Now he could find Jesus himself.  
And where previously, he could not use his voice to confess anything at all,  
now he and his friends **proclaimed** Jesus' miracle **zealously**.

...

Of the many things that Jesus did here, I am very intrigued by His groaning.  
I noted before how sighing is not really the most literal translation of the Greek word, sten'azō,  
which tends to intimate more of an expression of pain, or bitter grief,  
like the groaning of a woman in childbirth.

So here Jesus groans. But why?

I would submit to you that Jesus is doing what Isaiah said He would do:

not just making **the ears of the deaf... unstopped**, Isaiah 35:5

but [bearing] **our griefs and carr[ying] our sorrows**. Isaiah 53:4

As Jesus gives to this man the ability to hear and **speak plainly**,

releasing him from this corruption by sin, the grief and corruption do not just disappear;  
but Jesus takes them upon Himself so that He can take them to the cross.

We see that while we try to run and flee from our pain and suffering, Jesus steps into it.

He came for that very reason: to take your sin and all causes of your agony and groaning  
away from you so that He would bear them.

But look at the relief of the man. After Jesus groans, the man rejoices and zealously proclaims.  
Now, the man, freed from his deafness, can hear Isaiah's prophecy and know what Jesus was doing.  
Now, the man, freed from his speech impediment, can confess Jesus' salvation for himself and others.  
Now, the man can confess with his friends the wonderful and merciful works of God.  
Now, the man can hear of Jesus' death for him...and His resurrection for life everlasting again & again.  
Now, he can gather with the crowds to be near Jesus and hear the words of forgiveness won for him.

...

"But Pastor," you say, "this was back then. Jesus isn't still among us healing like this.

And I and the people I know still have a lot of pain and suffering."

And your pastors will agree with you, that there is still pain and suffering in the world today —  
and will be until the Last Day.

but we will adamantly disagree that Jesus isn't still among us, or that He doesn't still heal people.

It is true that we do not see Him walking among us like He did with the disciples,

and we don't often see or hear of such miracles immediately happening with the utterance of a word.

But remember that this was for a special purpose.

Isaiah 29:18

Even Isaiah thought it special when he wrote, **In that day the deaf shall hear the words of a book.**

Jesus and His apostles were enabled to perform such miracles to demonstrate what they preached. The miracles were for signs that what they spoke was true and was from God. As Jesus carried our griefs and sorrows, people were released from them. As Jesus was crushing the serpents head, the corruption of sin that Satan bound them in was loosed. As Jesus spilt His blood as the sacrifice for sin, He could release people from their guilt and shame. As He rose from the dead, proving that He is the Lord of Life, Death could not disobey Him. So when He was performing the miracles, they were to help the people... but not simply help them by relieving their earthly suffering, but to help open their ears, eyes, and hearts to receive Christ's salvation and to loose their tongues in glorifying God "**who has done all things well.**"

You and I know very well that suffering and groaning are still among us. Just like in those days, people are in such constant/desperate need of help – all the time. And not just others, but even you yourself. But do not fear. Do not be anxious. You know where to go to be near Jesus. You know where to go to hear Him speak to you, to have Him take you aside from the earthly crowds and touch your tongue with His own flesh. You know where to go to lay your griefs and sorrows, your sins and burdens, on Him for relief from your guilt and shame by His forgiveness and for certain hope of eternal life.

You need these weekly respites with your Lord, away from the worldly crowds, just like the disciples needed rest so that they could be rejuvenated by refocusing on Jesus. Soon enough you will go back out into the world, and soon enough all the cares, troubles, and fears will be in your face again, but know that you do not face them alone, not when Jesus is with you.

& there is a comfort in that (that Jesus is with you), as people constantly come to you with their needs, not just for a cup of sugar, but with a guilty conscience, with serious illnesses- fearful of death, with despair, desperate for some relief, some hope.

There is comfort in Jesus presence with you... because they are not coming only to you with your limited resources and understanding, but they are coming to you who are a member of the body of Christ, you are serving them as the ears of Jesus, listening to them bear out their hearts; you are serving them as the eyes of Jesus, pointing them to heaven from where their help comes; you are serving them as the finger of Jesus, as you touch their lives with acts of mercy and love; you are serving them as the mouth of God, when you tell them of Jesus Christ, their Savior from sin, guilt, & shame and forgive their sins in His name and zealously proclaim that **He has done all things well**, you are serving them as the feet of God, when you bring them to their Savior to be healed. You are the friends that intercede on their behalf. And the Lord loves to take aside and personally heal and forgive.

In deed **He has done all things well. He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak.**

We pray: "**O Lord, open my lips, And my mouth shall show forth your praise.**"

In Jesus Name. **Amen.**

*Soli Deo Gloria*