

And God Said, "I Love You!"
Mark 7.31-37
September 6, 2015

Then [Jesus] returned from the region of Tyre and went through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis. 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. And taking him aside from the crowd privately, he 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 Jesus charged them to tell no one. But the more he charged them, the more zealously they proclaimed it. And they were astonished beyond measure, saying, "He has done all things well. He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak."

My dear friends in Christ, today we are going to consider three points in the Gospel reading. When I read this text, I saw three things that need to be addressed; three things that just might help us deal with other people.

First, let's look at the story itself. Jesus is traveling along when some locals bring a man to him. According to Mark, this man is deaf and could hardly talk. And these folks beg Jesus to heal the man. By the way, these people are to be commended. They had a friend with a problem and they took their friend to the only person who can fix all problems.

So what does Jesus do? Does he have everyone gather around him and tell them, "Watch this!?" No. Does he stand the deaf man up, put his hand on the man's head, scream a prayer to God, then push the man over backward into the arms of a couple of waiting disciples, who catch him just before he hits the ground? No. Jesus isn't some television faith healer, who is about to make a pitch for donations to keep his ministry going.

With your mind's eye, watch how Jesus handles this. Jesus knew full well that people with handicaps tend to be self-conscious and easily embarrassed. So Jesus takes this poor man aside. He chooses to deal with him in private – one on one. Jesus chooses to help this man while giving consideration to his feelings – not in spite of his feelings. A lesson from our Lord worth remembering when we are helping people.

Next, understanding the man's limitations, Jesus doesn't start preaching to him. Jesus knew the man wouldn't comprehend because he couldn't hear. Jesus communicates in a way the man understands. Jesus touches the man's ears, then he touches the man's tongue. Jesus uses a sign language the man could understand. Using the man's language, Jesus asks if he wants to be healed. Another lesson, when witnessing to people, be sure to use language they understand.

Now, just prior to Jesus rendering his help, he looks to heaven and sighs – he prays. I can almost hear Jesus saying, “Father, let’s help this child of ours.” And then, just like he spoke all of creation into being, Jesus just speaks a word of re-creation – *Ephphatha!* – and the man’s ears are unstopped and his tongue is loosed.

Then, Jesus does something that probably shocked the people. Something that might be a little shocking to some of us. Jesus tells the people not to tell anyone what he just did. Why? Because Jesus wanted his ministry wrapped around the Gospel message not around his being a miracle worker. Jesus knew his message of grace and salvation would be lost on the crowds if they only came to see miracles. We, too, must remember that the message in our acts of Christian love is far more important than the deeds themselves.

Isn’t that a wonderful story? Now, I want to focus on one little phrase from the story: *who was deaf and could hardly talk*. Do you know the connection between being deaf and not being able to speak well? We learn to speak by repeating what we hear. And we know if we are pronouncing our words clearly by hearing our selves speak. That’s the connection. If you can’t hear others speak, you can’t repeat what you hear. And if you can’t hear yourself, you don’t know if what’s coming out of your mouth is understandable or not.

That’s the connection between hearing and speaking, but what’s the connection between that and our text? Jesus was concerned enough about this man’s lack of hearing that he stopped what he was doing to heal him. Jesus wanted the man to hear - for three reasons. He loved the man, he had something for the man to hear, and he had something for the man to do.

Jesus loved the man. Remember that Jesus was not only true man but also true God. This deaf man was more to Jesus than just one of the masses. This man was one of God’s creations, one of Jesus’ creations.. This deaf man was one of God’s children, one of Jesus’ children. He may have been a wayward child, we don’t know and it doesn’t matter. What does matter is he was one of Jesus’ children and Jesus loved him.

Jesus had something for the man to hear. Without hearing, this man was cut off from the preached Gospel message which Jesus came to bring. This man needed his hearing so he could know that God loved him enough to come into his world, live the life he couldn’t live for himself, and die for the sins he could pay for himself. Sign language might have been enough but Jesus was taking no chances. With his hearing restored, this man could hear firsthand the good news of God’s plan for his salvation.

And Jesus had something for this man to do. Remember I said because you can’t hear, you can’t speak? When Jesus re-created this man’s defective ears, he also loosed

this man's inhibited tongue. The message this formerly deaf man heard he was now able to tell others in clear and concise tones. Restored hearing meant restored speech. And you can bet this man used his new found ability to communicate to tell the world what his Savior had done for him.

I hope you're still with me. Because now we're going to look at the third point in the text and then I'm going to tie them all together.

Our last point is this – Jesus restored the man's hearing so he could hear the Gospel, but what exactly did Jesus want him to hear? Jesus wanted him to hear just three little words, "I love you." It's just that simple – "I love you." That's what God has been saying to mankind since Creation – "I love you."

Adam and Eve had eaten the forbidden fruit. The first sin against God had just been committed. What did God do? Did he burn them to ashes with holy fire? No. Genesis 3:15 says: *I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel* (Ge 3:15 ESV).

God was saying, "I know you just turned your back on me, but I love you."

Fast forward through time to Isaiah. The children of Israel had sinned over and over. God had rained down punishment on them, more than once, and then forgave them when they repented. He told Isaiah to tell this sinful, rebellious people: *For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace* (Is 9:6 ESV). God repeated his promise to send a Savior. He repeated his age-old message. "I love you."

Move forward again and listen as the angel Gabriel says: *Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David* (Lk 1:30-32 ESV).

This time God didn't just promise, he came in person. God, himself, took on human form and lived among sinful people so that he might live the perfect life we couldn't. God took on human form just to say, "I love you."

Jesus was tempted in the desert, abused by those who chose to be his enemies, and he denied his rights to use the full power of the Godhead just to say, "I love you." And in the ultimate act of love, Jesus dragged a cross up Golgotha just to say, "I love you." And, three days later, Jesus rose from the dead so he could scream back at Satan, "I love them, they're mine."

That is parts one, two, and three of the sermon. Are you wondering yet how I'm going to

tie them together? I'm going to tie them together by talking about you. You are in this story. Who are you? You're the deaf man who could barely talk. It's a beautiful story. Listen closely and I'll tell you how it works.

You came into this world with a birth defect. That birth defect made you spiritually deaf. You couldn't hear God's message of love. That birth defect was Sin; the sin that has been passed from generation to generation ever since the first sin in Eden. And, like the deaf man in the story, there's nothing you can do to help yourself.

So what happened? Like the deaf man someone brought you to Christ. Whether that was as a child or as an adult. Someone brought you to the cure for spiritual deafness. That cure is baptism. In your baptism, Jesus touched your deaf ears so you might hear him say, "I love you."

When else can you hear God say, "I love you?" Every time you pray, God is saying, "I love you. You have the right to come and talk to me."

Every time you come to church God is saying, "I love you. Your worship is acceptable to me."

Every time you hear the absolution pronounced, God is saying, "I love you. I forgive your sins."

Every time you attend the Lord's Supper, Jesus is saying, "I love you. Here is the seal of my promise of love."

So, now that Jesus has given you the ability to hear, you can also speak. And now that you can speak, you have just the thing to say. Like the deaf man, you can tell people that God loves them, too. You can explain God's love story as it's told through his plan of salvation. Instead of being the one who is spiritually deaf and needs to be brought to Jesus, you can be the one who brings those who are spiritually deaf to Jesus.

May our loving God, who has blessed you with the ability to hear and speak his truth, and who has begun this good work in you, bring it to completion in the day of our Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.