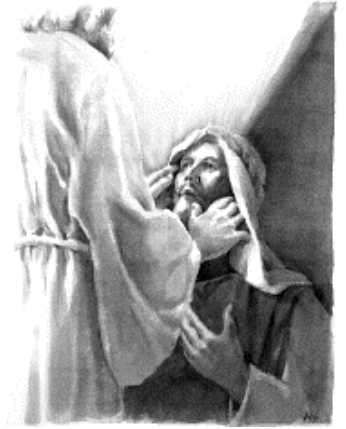

St. Luke Ev. Lutheran Church of Watertown
Sermon by Pastor Anthony E. Schultz
September 20, 2009 Pentecost '16 Mark 7:31-37



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, "Ephathath!" (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."

People of God – rescued from the flaming lake of fire in hell by the innocent blood of the very Lamb of God:



little girl named Helen was born on an estate called Green Ivy in Tuscumbia, Alabama. Her father was Captain Arthur – once a captain in the Confederate Army. Her mom was named Kate--a cousin of General Robert E. Lee. Helen's family traced its roots back to Switzerland. When Helen was a little more than a year and a half old – she had what doctors call *an acute congestion of stomach and brain*. That sounds nasty. Today we would probably call it scarlet fever or meningitis! She wasn't sick for very long – but she *lost* her abilities to hear and to see and to speak. She was shut off into a new world that was very dark and very quiet. I think it's almost impossible for most of us to imagine what that must be like. Almost impossible for us to appreciate how frustrating it would have to be – to be unable to hear people talking to you – unable to hear music – unable to hear birds sing and ducks quack and geese honk and crickets chirp and bees buzz – and the sound of rain drops falling and thunder rumble – and the countless sounds – that you hear all around you – all the time! Almost impossible to imagine what it must be like – to not be able to see the twinkle in the eyes and the beauty of a smile – of people we love! Not to be able to read a book or watch the news or see a movie! Imagine what it must be like – to be so cut off! The fact is – because of our sins – we were more than cut off from God himself. That's the most horrible isolation of all – to be cut off from God. But because of his amazing grace and goodness we are saved. We are redeemed! We are forgiven for Jesus' sake. Today God's Word is the most powerful and practical good news:

Jesus Opens Us!

- 1. Jesus opens our ears to hear**
- 2. Jesus opens our hearts to believe**
- 3. Jesus opens our mouths to share God's Word**

Every time we consider part of God's Word – it's always important to consider context. We never want to take God's Word out of context. That can lead to *misbelief* – despair – and other great shame and vice! How bad would that be? Our Gospel reading – our text – is from Mark chapter 7. Mark chapter 6 – after the feeding of the 5,000 men plus women and children –

maybe as many as 15,000 people—Jesus sent the disciples ahead in a boat—across the Sea of Galilee ahead of him—while he sent the thousands of people away—then went up on a mountainside to be alone—to pray to his Heavenly Father. Somewhere between 3 and 6 in the *morning*—Jesus took a short-cut walking on the water to catch up with his disciples. The disciples were straining at the oars—because the wind was against them. When they saw Jesus coming they thought it was a ghost. **Immediately he (Jesus) spoke to them and said, “Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.” Then he climbed into the boat with them, and the wind died down...** In Mark chapter 7 Jesus and his disciples went up north—by Lebanon—by Tyre and Sidon. **There a woman whose little daughter was possessed by an evil spirit came and fell at his feet. The woman was a Greek, born in Syrian Phoenicia. She begged Jesus to drive the demon out of her daughter.** At first Jesus ignored her—pretended he didn’t even hear her. When she persisted he told her, **“It’s not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to their dogs.” “Yes, Lord,” she replied, “but even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.”** Then he told her her daughter was free and whole and well!

Then Jesus left the vicinity of Tyre and went through Sidon, down to the Sea of Galilee and into the region of the Decapolis—that is ten villages in a clump—founded by followers of Alexander the Great—and reworked by later Roman governors—with their own coinage and even their own army. **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. Jesus took him aside, away from the crowd...** How kind and compassionate is Jesus? Jesus took him aside—away from all the people who might want to watch. Jesus took him aside—where he wouldn’t be embarrassed. Jesus would help this man quietly—privately—not showing off—not impressing the people around him. How soft and gentle were Jesus’ hands to help this man. **Jesus put his fingers into the man’s ears**—carefully, gently—this is the part Jesus is going to fix. **Then he spit.** Jesus would fix his mouth. Jesus **touched the man’s tongue.** This is the other part Jesus is going to fix. **Jesus looked up to heaven**—to His Heavenly Father. This power was from Heaven—where Jesus came from—to save us from our sins. **And with a deep sigh said to him, “Ephphatha!”** That means—**“be opened!”** **At this, the man’s ears were opened, his tongue was loosened and he began to speak plainly!**

“Be opened!” It’s hard to imagine what it would be like—to suddenly be able to hear! What would it be like—the first time you heard what? The first time you heard the sound of a baby—that indescribable sound a little baby makes when you hold them all wrapped up against your heart. The indescribable sound a Guinea Pig makes in their little box full of Cedar chips. The sound of the grill when you put steaks on. The sound of jets when they fly over after the national anthem at a Packer’s game. The sound of the voice of the people you love! Imagine if you couldn’t talk—and now you could! What would you say? Are we careful what we say and how we say it? Remember the epistle reading today? **“If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless!”** Think about that! Someone who is arguable the greatest basketball player of all time—was afforded great earthly glory at a dinner the other day. If you were asked to speak to a room full of players and coaches and people from the media—about the wonderful honor that was bestowed upon you—what would you say? Would you be humble and gracious? Would you take the opportunity to thank the people who had helped you and inspired you? Or would you use the opportunity to vent your resentment of people you thought had slighted and disrespected you *years and years* ago? Would you squander the opportunity telling people that you were inspired by a desire for revenge—by feelings of pride and resentment that motivated you to compete and to pound your rivals to a pulp—to prove them wrong—to prove that you

were better than they were? Would you squander the priceless opportunity to prove your self spiteful and bitter and petty and though you could physically seemingly defy gravity – to prove yourself small? If some day you become arguable one of the best tennis players of all – would you work with all the ability that Jesus provides – to glorify him by how you play tennis? And if – *heaven forbid* – the devil should succeed in tempting you to lose your temper and say things in the heat of the moment that were seriously hurtful and wrong – would you have the faith to admit your mistake and humbly ask for forgiveness? I don't know a lot about rappers – who can recite sometimes very complicated poetry very quickly. I don't know a lot about a man who grabbed a microphone away from someone during an awards ceremony – again – where people receive great earthly glory. But I do know this. The day after – when that rapper is on TV – ashamed of his rudeness – it is also extremely rude to say, "I met your mom once – about a year ago. I know she has since passed away. But what do you think your mom would think of your rude behavior?" When someone has made a mistake and is painfully embarrassed and painfully ashamed – it is not for us to embarrass them further – to mock and ridicule and make fun of their embarrassment. Rather – it is for us to encourage one another that Jesus died on the cross to forgive us for all the times we have said what we wished we didn't. It is for us to forgive one another. And it is for us to pray that the Holy Spirit would so fill our hearts and direct our tongues that we would be very *very* careful that what we think and what we say gives glory to Jesus and to Him alone! That is the religion – the faith and behavior that glorifies Him!

Jesus commanded them not to tell anyone. But the more he did so, the more they kept talking about it... Did you hear that? Jesus commanded them NOT to tell ANYONE! Can you keep a secret? If someone says to you – what I am about to tell you – you dasn't repeat! Do you? Dasn't means you must not – under any circumstances! Jesus **commanded them**. Jesus ordered them. The Son of God said – do not tell anyone! This was not false modesty. Jesus wasn't just being humble. He was telling them **not to tell anyone!** One of the books pastors can read about how to preach on this text says, "**True faith shows itself in witness (1 Peter 2:9) and worship and praising God for what he has done.**" That's entirely beside the point! The point here is – Jesus said don't tell! Don't breathe a word! If someone asks – tell them you can't discuss it – because Jesus said so! Does it make sense? It doesn't have to! It doesn't have to make sense to us – if God says so! It *does make sense* – if you think it through! Jesus did not become flesh – to heal every disease! Jesus didn't go up to every person and touch them – to make them physically perfect! If Jesus was here today – he would not touch every one of us wearing glasses – and make every one near sighted and far sighted to throw away their glasses – all the macular degeneration to regenerate – all the cataracts to disappear. Jesus didn't touch every tummy and put back all the gall bladders that have been removed. He wouldn't remove all the arthritis – make every spine straight – replace every finger that has been cut off – remove every scar from every burn – replace every tooth that was lost to decay and accident. He didn't! Jesus didn't make every one's hair thick and full and naturally curly! Jesus didn't come to put Dr. Turke and Theresa and Dr. Meade and Dr. Grosnik and Dr. Hoy out of business! And that was the danger! The danger was everyone with an ache or pain or physical imperfection would seek out Jesus to have their body mended – and what Jesus came to do was take our sins away! Jesus came to fix souls! And when all people wanted to do was have their body mended and have barley loaves and fish and wine like at the wedding in Cana for lunch – and then to see Jesus calm a storm or walk on water – they were missing the point!

Don't tell anyone! Jesus told the people back then to be quiet. And the more he told them to be quiet – the more they talked. Jesus told *us* – **Go and make disciples of all**

nations...and what do we do? Are we quiet about Jesus – because we are afraid of what people might think? A very famous movie star died the other day from pancreatic cancer. Whenever someone very famous dies – I always *always* wonder – did they know about Jesus? Did they believe in Jesus or not? After all – that’s absolutely the only thing that really matters. Did they believe in Jesus or not? Sometimes if you listen very closely – someone will say something that tells you – humanly speaking – if they knew about Jesus or not. This famous movie star who was my age – 57 when he died – knew for about a year and a half that he had pancreatic cancer – that according to the best medical opinion – which sometimes is completely wrong – that he was dying. So – someone asked him – knowing that you are dying – are you afraid? What would you say? Would you say you are not afraid to die? If you are not afraid – in your heart of hearts – why are you not afraid? We don’t need to be afraid – because Jesus washed away all our sins. We don’t need to be afraid – because Jesus loves us very *very* much. We don’t need to be afraid – because Jesus died on the cross to forgive us. That is simple historical fact. Jesus opens our hearts to know and believe he is our Savior and our Redeemer! Jesus opens our ears to hear the Gospel. And Jesus opens our mouths to sing and share his praises. Amen!

To God alone all glory!

Rsv. Anthony E. Schwartz