

THE AMAZING WORKS OF JESUS
Sermon for the 16th Sunday after Pentecost, 2018
Mark 7:31-37

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is the second half our Gospel, Mark 7:31-37, that part where Jesus heals the deaf and mute man: ³¹ **Jesus again left the region of Tyre and went through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee and through the region of the Decapolis.** ³² **Some people brought to Him a man who was deaf and could hardly talk and begged Jesus to lay His hand on him.** ³³ **Jesus took him away from the crowd to be alone with him and put His fingers into the man's ears. Then He spat and touched the man's tongue.** ³⁴ **He looked up to heaven, groaned and said to him, "Ephphatha!" which means, "Be opened!"** ³⁵ **Immediately the man's ears were opened, the bond of his tongue was untied, and he began to speak plainly.** ³⁶ **Jesus ordered the people not to tell anyone. However, the more He forbade them the more widely they kept telling about it.** ³⁷ **They were extremely amazed. They said, "He has been doing everything well. He even makes deaf people hear and dumb people speak."**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth, Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

We live in the most amazing times. Remember back when if someone had a phone in his car, it meant that he was very rich. Now most of us have a phone in our pocket or purse, and you can buy one for under \$50.00! Computers used to take up whole buildings, now they can be carried in one hand or in briefcases. Lots of things that were once considered an expensive luxury are now the norm for a lot of people. We could go on and on, listing all the amazing things that are happening in our world.

Yet what's most amazing is that none of this seems to amaze us anymore. We've become so used to new discoveries that they no longer surprise us. The phones in our pockets are so amazing that with the push of a few buttons we can talk to someone on the other side of the world, amazing, but no big deal. As for computers, we're only amazed by our powerful desktop computers when they don't work, or they don't operate fast enough. That begs the question: "*Does anything amaze us anymore?*"

When we turn our attention to God, we know how wonderful and almighty He is, but have we lost a sense of amazement when it comes to our God? In our text today, Jesus did something completely amazing.

Mark begins our text by noting, ³¹ **Jesus... left the region of Tyre and went through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee and through the region of the Decapolis.** This was an area east of the Jordan River and southeast of the Sea of Galilee, a region where the population was predominantly gentile. Jesus performed many miracles in the Decapolis and also preached the Word there. He again showed that Gentiles were not excluded from the kingdom of God.

We do not know how long this journey from Tyre to the Decapolis took, but during this time when Jesus shunned the public eye, He devoted much time to instructing His disciples privately - a very important task, since they were to take the Gospel out into all the world.

Jesus had been in the Decapolis once before.¹ At that particular time the people had asked Him to leave when they suffered the loss of a herd of pigs. The demon-possessed man whom Jesus healed had gone throughout the area proclaiming Jesus' power and mercy. This witness, by just one man, brought a remarkable change. Now, when Jesus returned, crowds gathered² and brought their sick to Jesus. Mark relates in our text just one of the healings Jesus performed, undoubtedly the most striking one. ³² **Some people brought to Him a man who was deaf and could hardly talk and begged Jesus to lay His hand on him.**

What a sad case. This man was beyond the ability of any physician to heal or even to improve - a man who was deaf and mute. Friends of the man brought him to Jesus. Since the man who was **deaf and could hardly talk** could neither understand easily nor express himself readily, ³³ **Jesus took him away from the crowd to be alone with him and put His fingers into the man's ears.** Jesus placed His fingers in his ears; He would give him hearing. Jesus **spat and touched the man's tongue**; He would give him the ability to speak clearly. Jesus **looked up to heaven... and groaned**. By looking up to heaven and groaning, Jesus showed the man that the cure He was bringing him was more

¹ Mark 5:20

² Matthew 15:30, Mark 7:33

than an ordinary man could perform. It came from God. Then Jesus spoke one word, **“Ephphatha!”** which means, **“Be opened!”** ³⁵ **Immediately the man’s ears were opened, the bond of his tongue was untied, and he began to speak plainly.** The man was immediately and completely cured. ³⁶ **Jesus ordered the people not to tell anyone. However, the more He forbade them the more widely they kept telling about it.** Jesus ordered the people not to tell anyone because the Jewish people of His day had a totally false, political conception of the coming Messiah. Jesus made it clear that He had not come into this predominantly gentile territory to organise a political insurrection. He had come on earth to lay down His life as payment for the sins of the world. He was determined to let nothing compromise the purpose for which He had come.

In contrast, we often seem to find it easy to keep our mouths shut about our God. Are we no longer amazed by Him? We seem to find it easier to talk about sports news or the latest hot television show or current world events than we do about the true God. Most of our dialogue with people we meet in our everyday lives is about some current event. While there is always something going on in the news, perhaps one thing that is constantly being reported that affects us all, is the current drought. I am sure we have all made mention of just how dry it is to others! And I am sure we have all heard different theories of when it will rain again or perhaps we have come up with our own. There is no doubt though, we are in the grip of perhaps the worst drought in living memory, and we must certainly keep asking the Lord to look upon us in favour to help us get through this difficult time.

The news often reports that scientists and experts say that man-made climate change is to blame, and they warn things will only get worse if we do not act now by reducing our carbon emissions. That man-made climate change is to blame is true to a certain extent. After all, if man didn’t sin in Eden, the climate today would be perfect. But since he did, our climate is not perfect. Like everything else, the earth’s climate has been affected by sin, and the Bible does indeed tell us that there will be increased turmoil in such things as the weather before Jesus comes again.³ God speaks of climate change when He says, *“As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease,”* (Gen. 8:22). God has the weather under His control, and He tells us that it changes. For us to be in drought is nothing out of the ordinary, the same as when a country suffers flooding. The fact we appear to be seeing more and longer lasting changes in our weather is because we are getting closer to the end, closer to Judgement Day. So, when we speak to someone, or have the opportunity to comment on such things as the drought, this presents the perfect opportunity to open our mouths and remind people of this.

The point we wish to make is that in our everyday conversation with people, no matter what the content of that discussion, whether it be about the weather, politics, or anything else, another good example is the abortion law now before the Queensland Parliament, we don’t want to keep our mouths shut to what God says about such things. God has given us mouths to speak, let’s use them to **speak plainly** to others what His will is for us in this life.

Another danger we all face by listening to man and forgetting God’s opinion on certain matters, is that our faith can grow dim.

The word translated as **“deaf”** in today’s text can also be translated “dull” or “blunt.” Has your faith become dull? Does your conscience no longer bother you when you do wrong?

It is so easy for us to put other things before God. Perhaps it is the pace of things in the world today, but it seems lots of people are always rushing around, trying to get things done, having no time for anything but looking after their own interests. When our focus is more on ourselves, and what we can achieve, then suddenly going to church, attending Bible Studies if we are able, or even taking a few minutes a day to read the Word of God becomes a chore, a burden. When our hearts become deaf to our amazing God, then it is no wonder our witness is mute as well! When that happens, there is only one place to go.

This deaf man’s friends brought him to Jesus **and begged (Him) to lay His hand on him.** Through Jesus’ word of power, **the man’s ears were opened,** and **the bond of his tongue was untied.** Nothing has changed today. Today, our Lord still works in people’s lives through His Word! That is why we are encouraged to worship, to be in the Word in our daily devotions, to read for ourselves God’s will for our lives. Through His Word, Jesus speaks His powerful, life-changing **“Be opened”** to your heart and mine.

³ Luke 21:25f

In this Word, Jesus uses His Law to expose our spiritual deafness, then with the Gospel, He tells the amazing story of His love for us in manger and cross and empty tomb. With that message, He is able to open our hearts. He makes our sin-dulled ears to hear clearly again the Good News of His love and forgiveness. Through His Word, our Lord is able to amaze when no one else can.

Hearing what God has done in Scripture opens our eyes and ears to the amazing things Jesus did in His death and resurrection and is even now doing in our lives. Yes, we are in the grips of a terrible drought, and we struggle, but we are still blessed. There might not be any rain at the moment, but there is no drought in the love shown to us by our Lord. We still have food on the table, clothes on our back, and a roof over our head. Most importantly, we are still able to freely gather around Word and Sacrament. There is no end to the mercy shown to us by the Lord. Remember last Sunday how Paul reminded us that the Devil and his evil angels will do all they can to lead us to despair, yet we know that the love Jesus has for us is far greater than the power of the devil. Our God truly is gracious.

Finally, we have something even greater than what anyone on this earth can offer, and it is amazing. We have a future we can't yet see and can only hear about: the eternal beauty and joy and love and delight of life eternal. Oh, will that amaze us! - and in ways, so we hear, that can't now even be put into words. The Apostle Paul simply calls it paradise, a place of perfection.⁴ We call it heaven.

Mark says that the people **were extremely amazed. They said, "He has been doing everything well. He even makes deaf people hear and dumb people speak."**

These people couldn't stop talking about what they had seen Jesus do. Even so can God amaze us, so that we can't help talking about what Jesus has done.

God is doing amazing things in our lives. "**Ephphatha!**" He says to you and me. He has opened our eyes and ears to be amazed! He will untie your tongue to tell the world what He has done for you! Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

PRAYER FOR THE SIXTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Heavenly Father, we worship You as the creator of all things and the preserver of our lives. In Your goodness You care for every one of Your creatures. We come before You in prayer with sincere and trusting hearts.

We thank and praise You for all Your goodness, but especially for the gift of Your only Son Jesus, whom You sent to suffer and die to rescue us from sin, and to rise again to guarantee the final crown of life for us in heaven. Through Him, we are Your children, enjoying the fullness of Your goodness and care. Give us firm faith in Your power and guidance, that we may continually trust You for all our daily needs, and carry out our daily tasks without worry about the future. No matter what may happen, give us the conviction that You direct all things in heaven and on earth by Your Word, and care especially for Your children.

Grant us Your grace that we may not live for the worthless values of this world or for the accumulation of wealth. We thank You for Jesus Christ, our most priceless treasure. Teach us to seek above everything else the blessings of Your kingdom in a life of loving obedience.

Make Christ's Word in all its richness live in our hearts and make us wise. Increase our love toward all people. Give us a special concern for those of the family of faith, and make us eager to help one another with our burdens and weaknesses. Fill Your Church with Your Spirit, that the compassion of Christ may be evident in the love and kindness we show to the fallen, the erring, and the heavy-laden. Let us never grow tired of doing good.

Grant that we, whose ears have been opened spiritually to hear Your Gospel, may speak it plainly to those who should hear it from us. Let Your light shine among the nations, so that the very ends of the earth may see Your glory, and people everywhere may learn to worship and serve You alone.

Bless our own country. May those in positions of government and authority honour You. May Your truth hold sway in politics, business, industry, education, and the mass media. Frustrate all attempts by those who wish to promote murder through abortion. Bring shame and discredit on those who advocate homosexuality and single-sex marriage.

In every day's needs and crises, help all families with Your presence. Be with them in sorrow or joy, sickness or health, disappointment or success, and make them safe and content in Your love. Bring forth rain to nourish the earth.

⁴ 2 Corinthians 12:4

Continue to direct our lives in your loving providence. Give us opportunities to use Your gifts as Your grateful stewards. Keep us in the faith by Your grace and power, that we may attain to eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour. Amen.

16th Sunday after Pentecost

Isaiah 35:4-7a

⁴ Say to those whose hearts are dismayed: “Be strong, do not be afraid! Look! Your God will come with vengeance, with the retribution of God. He Himself will come and save you!”

⁵ Then the eyes of blind people will be opened, and the ears of deaf people will be opened. ⁶ Then the lame man will leap like a deer, and the tongue of the dumb man will shout for joy. For water will gush forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert. ⁷ Then the parched ground will become a pool, and the thirsty ground will become springs of water.

James 2:1-10, 14-18

¹ My fellow-Christians, as you hold the faith in Jesus Christ, our Lord of glory, do not show favouritism! ² For, if a man with a gold ring on his finger and wearing fine clothes comes into your assembly for worship, and a poor man in dirty clothes also comes in, ³ and, if you give special attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say, “You take this good seat here!” and you tell the poor man, “You stand there!” or “Sit at my footstool!” ⁴ have you not shown favouritism among yourselves and become judges with evil motives? ⁵ Listen, my dear fellow-Christians! Has God not chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom that He has promised to those who love Him? ⁶ However, you have dishonoured the poor man. Do not rich people oppress you and are not they the ones who drag you into the courts? ⁷ Are not they the ones who say wicked things about the noble name after which you have been called? ⁸ If you really fulfil the Royal Law, according to the Scripture passage: “You shall love your neighbour as yourself!” you are doing well. ⁹ However, if you show favouritism, you are committing a sin, and the Law convicts you as transgressors.

¹⁰ For whoever keeps the whole Law and yet stumbles in one point has become guilty of them all...

¹⁴ What good does it do, my fellow-Christians, if someone says that he has faith but if he does not have works? That faith cannot save him, can it? ¹⁵ If a Christian man or woman is without clothes and daily food, ¹⁶ and one of you tells them, “Go in peace! Keep warm and well fed!” but you do not give them what the body needs, what good does it do?

¹⁷ So also, faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. ¹⁸ However, someone will say, “You have faith, and I have works. Show me your faith without works, and I shall show you my faith by my works!”

Mark 7:24-37

²⁴ Jesus left that place and went away to the vicinity of Tyre. He went into a house and did not want anyone to know it but could not avoid being noticed. ²⁵ Indeed, a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately heard about Him, came and fell at His feet. ²⁶ The woman was a Greek, born in Syrian Phoenicia. She kept asking Jesus to cast the demon out of her daughter. ²⁷ He answered her, “First let the children eat all they want! For it is not right to take the children’s bread and throw it to the pet-dogs.”

²⁸ She answered Him, “Lord, even the pet-dogs under the table eat some of the children’s crumbs.”

²⁹ Jesus told her, “Because you have said this, go! The demon has gone out of your daughter.”

³⁰ When the woman went home, she found her little child lying on the bed and the demon gone.

³¹ Jesus again left the region of Tyre and went through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee and through the region of the Decapolis. ³² Some people brought to Him a man who was deaf and could hardly talk and begged Jesus to lay His hand on him. ³³ Jesus took him away from the crowd to be alone with him and put His fingers into the man’s ears. Then He spat and touched the man’s tongue. ³⁴ He looked up to heaven, groaned and said to him, “Ephphatha!” which means, “Be opened!” ³⁵ Immediately the man’s ears were opened, the bond of his tongue was untied, and he began to speak plainly. ³⁶ Jesus ordered the people not to tell anyone. However, the more He forbade them the more widely they kept telling about it. ³⁷ They were extremely amazed. They said, “He has been doing everything well. He even makes deaf people hear and dumb people speak.”