

St Paul's Lutheran Church (Latimer, IA)
Trinity 12 – August 18, 2024
Mark 7:31-37 – Be opened!
Rev Peter Wagner

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

“In that day the deaf shall hear the words of a book, and out of their gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind shall see.”

This prophecy from Isaiah 29 should give you chills. Because that day is today, the book is the Bible, and you who once were deaf are hearing its words right now. Today God is fulfilling this prophecy in you. You hear the words of a book, read to you here in the church.

For today, in the church, you who were lost in the darkness of unbelief now see what all the prophets longed to see: the Incarnation of God, God with Us, Immanuel, here in our midst in his word and sacrament. You possess the great hope of Abraham and all the patriarchs. You live in the promises they ached with all their heart to know. They were wanderers and fugitives on the earth, searching for a better country. But you have come to Mount Zion, to the better country.

Here in the church, the living God has come down to you, to thrust his fingers into your ears and make you hear, to open your eyes to see him by faith, to give you fresh joy in the Lord. You were deaf to God's voice. You once covered your ears and fled from his presence. You were blind to the truth, hating the light, but now you have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

Because your Lord and your God became man to bring you here. He humbled himself and took a human body like yours, with ears and eyes and a mouth, to listen to your groaning, to see your suffering, and speak to you, saying, “Ephphatha... Be opened!”

The God who thrust his fingers into the deaf and mute man's ears, who groaned as he uttered these words, has come to touch you with his hand, and to suffer and groan for you on the cross.

His groans on the cross, his final cry, “It is finished,” – it was all for you. To unstop your ears and make you hear by faith the words of his book. To tear the scales from off your eyes, so you can behold the living God, God the Word, Jesus Christ.

And then, on the great day of his resurrection, the great and glorious day of the Lord, the day of the great Ephphatha, when even the tomb was opened and the earth opened its mouth to give forth the living God, then Jesus rose to unleash your tongue and make you cry out with Thomas and all who beheld him, “My Lord and my God!”

Now in the church, the living God has spit and touched your tongue. The Holy Spirit, who is the finger of God, touched you when you were baptized. When the sign of the cross was made upon your forehead and your heart, and the spit of the living God, plain water combined with the word of Jesus, “Whoever believes in and baptized will be saved,” – that water has become for you a lifegiving water, rich in grace, and a washing of new life in the Holy Spirit. When the water of baptism was poured on you, then your ears were opened to hear and believe and see and speak rightly, confessing the mighty works of God to save you.

And now in the church, the living finger of God, the Holy Spirit, still intercedes for you before the Father with groanings too deep for words, pleading to the Father to forgive and welcome you for the sake of the precious blood of the Son.

Therefore, thus says the Lord to you. This is what the Lord says who redeemed Abraham, concerning the house of Jacob. Concerning you, the church, the Israel of God: “Jacob shall no more be ashamed, no more shall his face grow pale. For when he sees his children, the work of my hands, in his midst, they will sanctify my name; they will sanctify the Holy One of Jacob and will stand in awe of the God of Israel.”

This means the church shall no longer be ashamed, tongue-tied, embarrassed to confront the world, to declare the truth about our Holy God. We shall not be ashamed to speak against the abominations all around us, transgenderism and homosexuality and abortion.

No, we shall stand in awe of our God, and sanctify his name by speaking rightly. For we are his children, children of Israel by faith, sanctified and made holy by the Holy One himself, the Holy Spirit, brought near by the blood of the Son to stand in the presence of the Father, to stand in awe of him.

So return, children of God. Today is the day. Rejoice in the presence of your Maker, the God of Israel. Hear the words of his book. Let him touch you and open you to believe and speak. Let him open your mouth and touch it with burning coals from his altar, his true body and blood. Let him teach you to confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, and be saved.

Let your ears never grow dull again. Let not your hope grow dim. Keep looking to Jesus, the author and perfecter of your faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Keep confessing him, your Lord and your God. Keep hanging onto every word he speaks, as your most precious lifeline of salvation.

Above all, keep hungering and thirsting for his word. For faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ. Pray to your God, Jesus Christ, to open your deaf ears every day, so that you may listen and soak it in, just as he opened the ears of the deaf man. Pray to your God, Jesus Christ, to open your blind eyes to read the words of his book, to meditate on them day and night, and never let them go. And pray to your God, Jesus Christ, to loosen your fat and clumsy tongue to begin speaking rightly.

Yes, our tongues are fat and clumsy. Despite all that God has done for us, we speak about him reluctantly. As if we're embarrassed, ashamed of the gospel. In the company of unbelievers, we grow timid and silent. Words do not come easily.

Where is our boldness? Where is our courage for the gospel? How often do we confess Christ in in our homes with our children? How often do we confess him in our workplaces and daily interactions? How often do we lead others in prayer, with words of wisdom flowing through us from the mouth of the Holy Spirit? Or, have we held our tongues in shameful silence, as if we were mute, not knowing what to say? I daresay none of us can claim to have confessed Christ in the world as boldly as we ought.

But you must speak. Since you possess the treasure of the pure gospel, you cannot remain silent. Speak to your children, to your family, and to your brothers and sisters in Christ in other denominations. Show them the clear light of Lutheran theology, the pure gospel. Speak to unbelievers, that they may begin to see the light, by the work of the Holy Spirit.

Stop speaking a lie, agreeing to keep your beliefs to yourself for the sake of jobs and relationships. Learn to speak rightly, orthodoxly, by faith. To speak the truth about Christ.

“Oh Lord, open my lips!” Let me not remain silent, dumb, and mute. You have given me the privilege of hearing the true preaching of your Word in the church. Now make me hear the words of your book daily and drink them in. And teach me to imitate those words, so I can begin to speak! The salvation of my brothers and sisters depends upon it. I love them, therefore let me speak! Otherwise they will never hear, they will never believe, but will perish eternally.

So pray to God for words. Earnestly hear and imitate the words of his book, and speak! Ephphatha, I say to you! Be opened, mute tongues of the people of God, to speak the truth of Christ in the world!

“For how are they to call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!’... So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.”

May the God of truth, Jesus Christ, who opened the ears of the deaf and loosed the tongues of the mute, may he open your deaf hears to hear the word of his book. And may he open your blind eyes to behold him as the living God. And may he open your mute tongues to declare his praise and salvation in all the earth. Amen.

Now may the peace of God which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting. Amen.