

✠ Jesu Juva ✠

## Ephphatha – Be Opened

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

Our text is from the Gospel reading according to St Mark, chapter 7, verses 34-37 – *‘Then He 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.”’* This is our text.

In the Name of Jesus, Who does all things better than well.

Ephphatha – be opened.

You approach a door at the hospital – it automatically opens without you touching a thing – not even stepping on a sensor. Man, by God’s gracious provision, has invented the electronic sensors that constantly monitor the approach to the doors and then send a signal to motors to open the doors. We have been gifted by all kinds of marvelous technologies. With my car, I can set the cruise control and if I am gaining on a car ahead of me, the electronics will automatically reduce my speed to avoid a collision and match the speed of the car ahead. True, not an ephphatha (I like that word) moment, but it is one of God’s gifts.

But our text is not about modern technology. What would you like opened? Don’t say the pickle jar. Think big. My mother told me that when I was born, I was literally tongue-tied. The little piece of skin on the underside of my tongue stretched all the way to the tip of my tongue so I couldn’t wiggle it in order to speak. The doctors opened my voice by simply snipping that skin back.

What would you like opened or at least corrected? Many of us wear glasses. Why? Because our eyes don’t give us a clear picture of things without them. Some of us wear hearing aids. Why? Same answer. Would we like these things to be fixed? Imagine the eye doctor, the hearing aid technician, saying, “Ephphatha” and your eyes would see perfectly, or you would hear clearly.

Our text is about opening things other than eyes or ears, or perhaps a heart, liver, or kidney transplant. So for the next few minutes, we’ll take a look at who this is about and what it is about.

Our full Gospel reading earlier began by saying Jesus and the disciples returned from Tyre and journeyed to the east side of the Sea of Galilee. In Tyre, a Syrophenician woman pleaded with Him to heal her demon-possessed daughter (*Mark 7:24-30; Matt 15:21-28*). You heard this just before COVID hit in March. She was not a Jewish woman, but a Gentile; however, she prayed, “(*Matt 15:22b*) Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David.” That’s Messianic language! Now, He has journeyed into the region on the east side of the Sea of Galilee to an area called the Decapolis, “Ten cities” in Greek. These too are Gentiles. I’ll speak bluntly and not politically correct. They bring a bum to Him that He might fix his ears and tongue. Being handicapped in such a manner, there was little work for him to do. Not that he couldn’t do it, but “He’s been cursed by the gods. I don’t want him around lest he bring disaster upon my business.” We’ve still got that problem; although, we may not blame it on the gods. We have other excuses, perhaps more about that next week.

We know the Canaanite woman had saving faith. She called Jesus the Son of David – code language for Messiah, the Savior of the world. And Jesus said, “(*Matt 15:28*) O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire.” “(*Rom 10:17*) So faith comes from hearing, and hearing

through the word of Christ.” She had heard and was called to faith. These Greeks have heard the truth and are called to faith.

But does God only answer the prayer of the faithful? All may offer a prayer to God, but only those who call upon Him in the name of Jesus (*John 14:13-14*) should **expect** to be heard and answered. Unbelievers may be answered, but only because God is gracious and merciful (*Psa 145:8*), desires all to be saved (! *Tim 2:4*), and the answer fulfills His plan.

Who is this all about? As we read and meditate upon these words, on whom should our focus be? Should it be on the man who is deaf and mute? He is healed. He is the one who gets all the benefits from Jesus’ action. Should it be on the crowds, particularly the friends of the deaf man, who brought him to Jesus for healing? They certainly did a good thing, so maybe. But you know the answer. It is all and only about Jesus. The people did a good thing, and I’ll say more about that in a moment. The man, like his friends, has faith. But He couldn’t do a thing to cure his ailments, or he would have done so long ago. The same is true of his friends. If they had had healing power, they would have fixed his hearing and speech without coming out to see Jesus.

No, it’s all about Jesus. He gives hearing and He gives speech. Mark writes that the people ‘were astonished beyond measure, saying, “He had done all things well.”’ I marvel as well. It’s not that Jesus does all things well, but that He does all things perfectly. Consider the child born with some infirmity. Maybe it is minor, like me being born tongue-tied. Both of my sons were slightly pigeon-toed. So we got them special shoes that after several months got their feet pointing in the normal manner. But they weren’t cured in the instant they put the shoes on. Or the young person who gets braces on her teeth. It’s not a matter of “put these on today, and tomorrow you can throw them away and your teeth will be perfect.” But with Jesus, that’s exactly what happens!

He places His fingers in the man’s ears. He spits and touches the man’s tongue with the saliva. He speaks and the man’s ears are opened, and he speaks plainly, rightly, correctly. How does that happen? Jesus heals the cripple at the Pool of Bethesda, who has been an invalid for 38 years (*John 5:1-9*). He can’t move fast enough when the water is stirred to be the first into the pool for healing. Jesus simply speaks and tells him to get up and take his cot home. John doesn’t say he stumbled and staggered to his feet and then limped or crawled away. Why didn’t he say that? Because the man was completely and perfectly healed. He got up and walked as if he has been walking ten miles-a-day for the last 38 years. Think of the person who has been in bed for a week with COVID, does he spring right to his feet and walk perfectly? I hardly think so. The same is true of our man. He speaks perfectly, not next week, but immediately. John writes, “(*John 1:3*) All things were made through Him, [that is Jesus], and without Him was not any thing made that was made.” Jesus simply corrects this man’s body that was corrupted by the curse of sin, by creating the necessary parts anew.

It’s all about Jesus, but it’s more. He healed countless people of a multitude of infirmities just as Isaiah prophesied (*Isa 35:5-6; Isa 29:18*). He fed thousands upon thousands, just as He fed the million in the wilderness with manna (*Exo 16:5ff*). John records the people wanted to make Him a ‘bread king.’ Or perhaps the chief medical provider. But that’s not why He came. He charged them now, and on other occasions, not to tell anyone. He has compassion and heals, feeds, raises the dead, but that’s not why He came. He heals many infirmities and cancers today. He puts bread on our tables and clothes in our closets today, but none of those things are why He came. He didn’t come to establish an earthly kingdom then or ever (*John 18:36*). “(*John 3:16-17*) For God loved the world in this way, He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him.” He came to save the world both Jew and Gentile, which is good since we are all

Gentiles – “(Isa 49:6 NKJV) It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, that You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth.”

Jesus is God in the flesh – Immanuel. But He doesn’t stop at fixing broken bodies. He fixes our wretched brokenness, our separation from God, which is death. He took on your infirmities. But more, He took your sins and He died your eternal death to save you. Paul writes, “(II Cor 5:21) For our sake He made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.” He has reconciled us to the Father by taking our sin-stained robes and clothing us in the pure, white robe of His righteousness. Before God, we now stand righteous. This too is an ephphatha moment. In His death and resurrection, He has opened the gates of Paradise for all believers. You are at home now!

Jesus gives you hearing that you may hear the pure Word of God. After He healed the man born blind, some of the Pharisees wanted to know “(John 9:40 NASB) We are not blind too, are we?” They thought because they could literally see, they weren’t blind. But they couldn’t see spiritually; they still lived in their sins of self-righteousness and their rejection of Jesus as their Savior, so they were still blind. They lived by sight, not by faith, by flesh not by the Spirit. We not only hear the word of God, but we believe the word of the Gospel because the Holy Spirit has called us to faith. He feeds us with His perfect body and blood for the forgiveness of our sins. Our spiritual hearing is a gift of Christ; it is called faith.

Living in that God-given faith and God-given love, we serve our neighbor. That’s what the friends of this deaf-mute were doing. They had faith Jesus could heal their friend, but they didn’t know how far that healing would go. But in love they brought him to his Savior. So, when we get to the end of the story, it’s about Jesus, but it’s about you living the life of love in Christ Jesus. Our life of love in Christ is in the shape of a cross. God’s love in His only-begotten Son comes down to us and then flows out to our neighbors. (Neighbors we’ll talk about next week.) Paul writes, “(Rom 6:4) We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.”

Ephphatha – be opened! I can’t do it. But Christ has already opened your ears, eyes, mouths, your entire being to the precious gift of salvation. He died to save you. The Psalmist sings, “(Psa 146:8) The Lord opens the eyes of the blind. The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down; the Lord loves the righteous.” And we respond in praise, “(Psa 146:1) Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord, O my soul!” Amen.

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