

This entire text in Mark 7 is all about one man. A man who is deaf and can hardly speak. How many deaf people do you suppose Jesus healed? How many lepers? How many paralytics, and others who were sick with various diseases? The number is astounding. Why, then, does St. Mark devote this entire Scripture text to the healing of just one man? Not only that, why does Jesus take such unusual steps to heal this one man? Over the course of His ministry, He healed multitudes with just a word from His mouth. And many were healed simply by touching the edge of His garment.

But not this man. Jesus takes him aside from the crowd privately. He puts His fingers into the man's ears. He spits and touches the man's tongue with His saliva. He looks up to heaven and He sighs. And after all this, He says, "*Ephphatha*," and the man's ears are opened and his tongue is released. What's so special about this man that he gets all this attention both from Jesus and from St. Mark?

Well, he is somewhat unique. He is a Gentile and not a Jew. And I suppose we could add this, that he is loved. An entire crowd brings him to Jesus, and they beg Jesus to heal him. But that's it as far as we can tell. Apart from these, he is just an ordinary man who needs Jesus.

Yet, that's it, isn't it? The one who has special needs, needs special attention. And no one is ordinary who is in need of Jesus. And this is why you and I are not at all ordinary. We should see ourselves in this man. Whether we are deaf or not. Whether we can speak well or not. Whether we are loved or not. Think of yourself as this man because, for you too, Jesus took extraordinary measures to open your ears and loosen your tongue.

In the earlier days of the Christian Church, the baptismal service included the word *Ephphatha*, "be opened." This word was spoken to the one who was being baptized just as Jesus spoke this word to the deaf man.

In your baptism, Jesus took you aside from the crowd of the world, privately to the baptismal font, and He opened your ears to His words of life, and He loosened your tongue to "*proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.*" This man is a Gentile like you. This man is deaf and mute as you were. And Jesus goes to a lot of trouble to heal this man just as He did for you.

Now if you are like most people, you do not want others to go to a lot of trouble for you. You don't want to be a bother, a burden. But as I look around this room, I do not see anyone, myself included, who is not a bother and a burden in some way. We all have needs, whether our needs are unique or not. Not one of you is ordinary. You are all special because you all need Jesus.

And so, He went to a lot of trouble to bring you here today because you need Him. Yes, we the baptized, need Him. This sinful world has a way of closing our ears to Jesus. It can make us deaf to what we need to hear most. And it can silence our tongue to what we need to confess and proclaim most. But Jesus is here with His *Ephphatha* to re-open your ears; to place within them

His words of life. And He is here to re-loosen your tongue to confess and proclaim with joy what He has done for you.

What Jesus did for the deaf man they could not stop proclaiming. Here's what they said: "*He has done all things well!*" And they were right. Jesus did everything well. Deaf and dumb, lepers, paralytics, demon-possessed – Jesus healed them all, and then some.

But they didn't know the half of it. What Jesus did well, and it was our greatest need of all, was to suffer and die upon the cross. He did this for us because we do all things poorly. We don't do anything well. Even our most righteous deeds, writes Isaiah, are filthy rags.

But friend, what Jesus did well, He did for you. He took what you do poorly, and He gives to you what He did well. He covered Himself with your filthy rags, and He covers you with His holiness and innocence.

He forgives you, my friend. He truly does. Whatever you have done poorly, He forgives. However filthy with sin you are, God declares you clean, forgiven of all your sin for Jesus' sake. Are your ears open to hear this? This good news is for you. It's not Jesus who puts His fingers into your ears; it's the devil. The last thing he wants you to hear is that your sins are forgiven.

I have had the privilege, as have many pastors, of sitting with church members as death approached. Many of these were your loved ones. And the last thing the devil wanted them to hear is the very thing that Jesus placed into their ears through their pastor's mouth – that their sins were forgiven for Jesus' sake. And what assurance this gave them! And what joy their pastor had to hear their tongue confess Jesus as their Savior from sin one last time before they died.

Ephphatha. It's a beautiful word. Beautiful for the deaf man. Beautiful for you. Beautiful for your loved ones who died in Christ. And do you know that they, with us, will hear that word one final time? When Jesus returns in glory – *Ephphatha!* – and the graves of His saints will open, and the tongues of His saints will be released from death. And together we will cry out with joy: "Jesus has truly done all things well!" Amen.