

Mark 7:31-37

In the tale, “1001 Arabian Nights,” forty thieves hide a magnificent treasure inside a magic cave. The only way into the cave is by saying the phrase, “Open sesame.” Hiding outside the mouth of the cave, Ali Baba hears the thieves speak the phrase, and later he is able to open the cave doors and take the treasure by repeating those same words.

Have any of you, when you were little, tried out those words on something? Maybe you did it with friends. Maybe in secret by yourself. You just had to find out if it would work. So you spoke the words, “Open sesame,” but the garage door wouldn’t open, or whatever door you were speaking to. You didn’t tell anyone because you would have felt foolish, but you had to try it just to see.

Well, let’s not go home today and try out the word, “Ephphatha” on your loved ones who have hearing problems. I’ll tell you right now that it won’t work. Jesus spoke this word to the deaf man in our text. “Be opened,” is what it meant. But it’s not a magic word that works for anyone who repeats it. It’s not an “Open sesame” that works whether it’s spoken by a thief, by Ali Baba, or by anyone. The man’s ears were opened not because the words, “Be opened,” were spoken to him, but because those words were spoken by Jesus.

Everyone knows that cave doors do not have ears. And yet the words, “Open sesame” opened up the cave anyway. We might notice that in our text the words, “Be opened” were spoken to ears that could not hear. Who, or what, was Jesus speaking to? The man could not hear Him. And yet his ears were opened anyway. This great lesson teaches us what faith is--the faith that dwells and lives within you as God’s children.

When you were baptized Jesus spoke the words, “Be opened” to you. But you weren’t listening. You and I could not hear Him any more than the deaf man in our text could hear those words. We were like a stone cold cave. We were born dead in our sins, and dead people cannot hear. Oh, we could hear the doctor telling our mother, “What a beautiful baby you have!” We could hear the sound of our own cries. And we could hear the voice of Satan because he, at that time in our life, was our master. But we could not hear the sweet sound of our Savior’s voice. Born dead in sin, you and I were born apart from the love of God; apart from His life and salvation; apart from faith in Christ.

But that did not stop God from making you His child. Nothing can stop Him. He spoke to the emptiness before anything was created. He said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. Through Moses He spoke to a rock--a stone cold rock--and out of it came water for the people to drink. Jesus spoke to the body of a dead man lying within the darkness of a cave, and Lazarus, whose ears had died with the rest of his body, came out alive. And He spoke to a man who was deaf, and that deaf man heard. And friend, so can you.

Oh, anyone can come in here, sit down, and hear the pastor preaching from the pulpit. Anyone with ears. But you do not hear with ears; you hear with faith. And the difference is striking. Those who hear only with their ears will have, as St. James puts it in our Epistle, a faith that “is dead”--which is no faith at all. They can listen to a sermon, and yet keep on living as if they never heard the words preached to them. They can hear the words of Absolution, and yet keep on living as if they were still burdened under the weight of their sins. They can hear the words given to them with the body and blood of Christ in the Sacrament, and yet keep on living as if Jesus and His gifts were not that important and meaningful to them. That’s not hearing with faith, and anyone can do it, and most do. I may as well be preaching to a cow, or to a rock, or a dead body. The words will have the same effect.

But friend, you are not a cow. You are not a stone cold rock. And you were dead in your sins, but Jesus spoke to you in your baptism, and though you could not hear Him, His words with the water--the saliva of His mouth--gave you faith, made you alive in God, secured for you a place in His family. Your faith is not something you did. Your faith is like the deaf man when he could hear. Jesus spoke hearing into his ears, and He spoke faith into your heart. Your faith is like Lazarus when he came out. Jesus spoke life into his body, and He spoke a living faith into you when you were baptized.

Now consider how foolish that deaf man would have been had he walked around, after Jesus gave him his hearing, with his hands covering his ears. How ignorant--blessed with the gift of hearing, to then live like a deaf man with his hands over his ears! But if that would have been foolish and ignorant, what is it when a Christian, who is given the gift of faith, lives with his faith all covered up? What else is it but foolish when a baptized Christian covers his eyes to the Bible at home...covers his ears to the Word by hardly, if ever, taking the time to hear it and study it...covers his heart to the mercy of God by refusing to allow His Holy Spirit to draw him to the Sacrament of Christ's body and blood?

We need to stop doing something. We need to stop telling others, and our own selves, "I have faith!" "Don't tell me," says James, "Show me." That deaf man could show people every day, for the rest of his life, that he could hear, not by saying, "I can hear," but by hearing, by listening, by doing. I do not want to hear any of you saying, "I have faith," or "My loved one has faith." The gift of faith is like hearing. Your hearing will show itself in the way you live, and so will your faith.

People of faith come to hear the voice of Jesus. People of faith come to receive His Sacrament. People of faith love His Word; they don't live apart from it. People of faith sin, but they believe they are forgiven because they hear and believe the words of Absolution. People of faith do not try to convince everyone around them that they have faith. They just live their faith because Christ lives in them.

Now listen and hear these words...whether you have been living your faith, or not; whether you have been living more like a cow than a child of God...He is speaking to you now. His words are for you. He forgives you. He loves you. His Son, Jesus Christ, died for you. Jesus heard the sounds of the whips lashing into His body. He heard the sounds of the nails being driven into His hands and feet. He heard the cries of the blasphemers from beneath the cross. But His Heavenly Father heard His Son say, "Father, forgive them." And He does. Today, you are forgiven. All your sins are forgiven. Jesus took them. Now you go and live in such a way that others can see that you, with faith, believe this. Amen.