

"Lord God, You have appointed me as a bishop and pastor in Your Church, but You see how unsuited I am to meet so great and difficult a task. If I had lacked Your help, I would have ruined everything long ago. Therefore, I call upon you: I wish to devote my mouth and heart to you; I shall teach the people. I myself will learn and ponder diligently upon Your Word. Use me as Your instrument -- but do not forsake me, for if ever I should be on my own, I would easily wreck it all."

"Sir, we would see Jesus."

JESUS HEALS A DEAF MUTE MAN

Gospel -- Mark 7:31-37

31 Jesus left the region of Tyre again and went through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, within the region of the Decapolis. 32 They brought a man to him who was deaf and had a speech impediment. They pleaded with Jesus to place his hand on him. 33 Jesus took him aside in private, away from the crowd. He put his fingers into the man's ears. Then he spit and touched the man's tongue. 34 After he looked up to heaven, he sighed and said, "Ephphatha!" (which means "Be opened!") 35 Immediately the man's ears were opened, his tongue was set free, and he began to speak plainly. 36 Jesus gave the people strict orders to tell no one, but the more he did so, the more they kept proclaiming it. 37 They were amazed beyond measure and said, "He has done everything well. He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak!"

+ + +

Here's what the man who didn't talk for 17 years learned. Well-received at first, after a few weeks his girlfriend wanted him to stop. His parents thought he had been taken over by a Californian cult. His dad was enraged. John Francis liked not speaking. He laughed without sound. He earned a Ph.D. He refused to drive, and began to walk long distances, like across the United States. He learned sign language. He played banjo. He could do a lot of things well.

John Francis explained later that, for 17 years, he liked not speaking. It gave him peace. He took it as a gift.

That's what a man learned in silence. It helps us understand. But that man had the choice. What about the man in our gospel who couldn't choose to speak? What about a man who, in his silence, couldn't even hear, let alone listen?

As usual, Jesus brings us the answers. He does this by caring enough to add a personal touch to this miracle. He doesn't just get one man talking, but many people, even in this time and place, saying:

YOU CAN TELL THAT JESUS DOES WELL

1. Jesus does well

There are many similarities in the Bible's miracles. The fun part is finding what is unique about each one. The emphasis here is on how well Jesus does this miracle. Jesus was traveling in the Decapolis, or ten-cities, region. They were predominantly Gentiles with their own currency and army. Herod had expressed interest in Him, so Jesus was really making a wider circle around the Sea of Galilee. That way He could dodge some of the crowds that wanted to make Him king of the bread. And His ministry wasn't complete, so He could also dodge Herod. So even in this Gentile region, Jesus shows His heart for all people by doing this miracle well.

First, He took the man aside. He didn't want to embarrass the man. He didn't want a crowd. Mark even changes verb tense to sort of slow down the action. It was time for the man to fix his mind on Christ alone, the healer. This personal moment "took the place of the sermon until the man was able to hear."

Second, He put His fingers on the affected organs, ears and his tongue. This was not a distant healing, like other healings (the Syro-Phoenician woman and the centurion). Jesus was adapting to this man's circumstance for such a time as this. The man understood the language of signs, and Jesus was making those signs literally in the man's face. Afterwards, the man would never doubt that it was Jesus who cured him. He was setting the man up to remove not just his illness, but his doubts.

Third, Jesus looked up. Throughout His life, Jesus the Son of God always kept in touch with His Father. He was never grumbling in opposition to His Father. He was teaching us the unity of the Trinity. He was teaching us that His Father was a closely connected "Our Father." Some even think this suggests it wasn't Jesus sleight of hand, but the power of His Father, that brought the whole miracle to being, in answer to the prayer of the Son.

Fourth, Jesus sighed. It was almost a groan. It was another burden on the shoulders of the man of sorrows. That's what Isaiah 53:3 said Jesus would be, the "man of sorrows, familiar with suffering." Jesus took the burdens of the man and felt the man's sound-prison in His own heart. Jesus agonized over the consequences of what sin does to the people of this world. He shuddered and sighed at the very thought of sin in the physical suffering of mankind. He was profoundly moved by what is, rather than what might have been.

With all these stages of the miracle, we see how well Jesus did. It's not just leading up to a special word, "Ephphatha." Almost everything that comes first is just as special as that. It's deepening what we think of when it is Christ Jesus *for us.*

Finally Jesus spoke the powerful word, "Ephphatha," "Be opened." For He can command not only intelligent creatures, but also the insentient wind, sea, hail, etc., and also the limbs of the human body. By this mighty Word both the poor man's tongue and his ears were healed.

- Psalm 33:9, "He speaks, and it is done. He commands, and thus it is."
- 1 John 3:8, "The reason the Son of God appeared was to demolish the devil's work."
- Psalm 51:14-15, "Save me from bloodguilt, O God, the God who saves me, and my tongue will sing of your righteousness. O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise."

Now imagine: This deaf, mute man with his ears unclogged for possibly the first time. Jesus wanted him to hear music for the first time. He wanted the man to perceive pitch and tone, feelings and thoughts, poetry and rhyme, since the wealth and riches of sound was entirely unfamiliar. Jesus wanted to untie the bond of his tongue so that in prayer he could do as his friends did, speak with God, urge the Son of God to help, to confess his sins and shame with his own mouth, and to express his gratitude. Jesus wanted this man in the peace of forgiveness to praise the Lord. What new dimensions the Son of God and Son of Man wanted for the deaf mute!

What a blessing! To communicate with God, my Savior! Hasn't Jesus done all things well for you, too? Hasn't God opened your mouth? Do you use your tongue to praise God? Do you use your ears to hear what God has to tell you? Do you take it for granted that out of the lips of children God has ordained praise? There are people who cannot talk. They have to sign their way through life. Many of them potentially live happy lives due to advances in technology, Braille, modern signs, microphones and hearing aids assist us. But this world doesn't serve them like it serves you who can talk and hear. This world doesn't give each of us personal attention like the God of Mark 7.

Are you aware that God did not need your lips and ears to form his praise? He has the rocks, the animals, the stars, the wonders of time and space. What a definite privilege it is to hear Him, really hear Him! What an inheritance to lift our voices at all, let alone in His praise!

So He didn't need people to witness this miracle. But they wanted to use their voices anyway to reach more ears.

2. You can tell

The one thing Jesus didn't speak into existence throughout this gospel account was silence. That's because the friends of this man, the people of this region, had a love that was loud. Many of these people had adopted the pressing need of this poor man as their own need. They brought the man to Jesus for help.

It was a loud example of both faith and love. They heard in faith that The Lord was good and faithful and helpful. Word had to come first of God's goodness. It had to reach their hearts to hold on in faith. In love, Christ's goodness and mercy spread through them. This was without their merits or initiative or anything from them. It was spontaneous, gratuitous, and overflowing. Love must always do its work this way. Love has no other consideration than a neighbor's welfare (1 Co 13:5, "love does not insist on its own way"; Php 2:4, look out for the "interests of others"). No reward is asked for; any favor in return is out of the question.

This faith and love should mark us, or we are not Christians. Notice that love takes on another man's troubles. Faith and love takes on a frustrated friend at work. Faith and love takes on a sympathy card for a suffering church friend. Faith and love takes on our ears to listen and our mouths to speak comfort. Faith and love prays for the hopeless number of needles and drugs out there on the streets in this America and abroad. Faith and love takes on those who do not have ears to hear or mouths to speak, the deaf, the mute, the unborn of our time. Faith and love gives to causes that need and missions that feed (feeding both body and soul to really be a mission).

One way faith and love says this is in the words of these Decapolitans: "He has done all things well." They could just tell. He wasn't the traveling entertainer or man of the year they wanted to put on the cover of their magazines. He was more. He wanted them to believe because of His Word, not because of the miracles. I even read one commentator who said Jesus was swamped with work already. He didn't need more publicists, but that's what He got in this region of Palestine. And the more He told them to pipe down about this event, the more they broadcasted it with amazement and the words, "He has done all things well."

"He who hears you hears Me," Jesus said (Luke 10:16). That means we have to go to the Word to get the Word on how to use the Word. But we also are granted the privilege of going to God's Word to get the Word on how to use the Word. Every time we share it, we praise Him. In fact, it's been said that there's no better, no louder, way to praise Jesus than to tell His Word in its truth and purity.

If you have a faith, it's because Jesus spoke into your ears how to listen first. Now you hear everything differently. But if you don't have a faith in Jesus, maybe you're just not hearing Him. Maybe it's just because you haven't yet really listened. It may feel like a lot of fingers getting stuck in your face. It may have seemed like a lot of clucking and shouting and chattering, but by now you might have missed the meaning. Here it is: The friends who surround you today have a Savior to share. He knows you well, and he loves you so well. He wants the best for you not just in the moment, but for your eternal soul. He wants to carry your missteps and maladies away, so that you can have the depth of peace. Won't you hear him? Won't you listen?

CONCLUSION: When John Francis – the man who chose not to speak for 17 years – finally spoke, he gathered his friends and family. When his voice sounded, he laughed, because he didn't recognize it – his own voice. His dad was still enraged and thought he was crazy. John met his wife. He started using vehicles again. But he decided he would always really listen when it came to understand what people were trying to say.

Jesus is listening, too, really listening. Jesus also chose to set aside His abilities as true God. He chose to become like one of us, taking up our sorrows and infirmities, to sympathize with our weaknesses. And he hears things like your struggles as a regular person, because He was there, sharing the same feelings. He felt the confusion this world causes. He wanted to be in that place you are just so He could be in that place where you are, just so it can be well with your soul, just so He can do well for you.

Amen.

Telic Note: Jesus does well.

Malady: We cannot make others listen.

Proposition: Jesus does well what sinners cannot do at all.

Purpose: I pray that the HS leads my hearers to tell others that Jesus' works are well, so that it can be well with their soul.