

15<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost, Mark 7: 24-37 (Proper 18)  
Christ heals a little girl and a deaf man.

Isaiah 35:4-7a

Psalm 146

James 2:1-17

*Preached at the Lutheran Church of Our Saviour, Greenville, SC on Sunday September 5<sup>th</sup>, 2021.*

The steadfast love of God, the life of Jesus Christ, and the growth of the Holy Spirit  
be with you all. Amen.

\***Ephphatha!** (*F' – fah - tha*) ... Be opened! ...

It was this **Aramaic** word that Jesus spoke to the man who was **deaf** and **mute**  
brought to him in the region of the **Decapolis**.

**“Ephphatha!”** ...

Now some scholars believe

that this word was directed **only** toward the opening of the man's **ears**.  
Yet others say it was **also** directed to the loosening of his **tongue**;  
curing this man of his speech impediment.

But to be opened – **Ephphatha** – goes much further than just the **physical**.

It also means to be **opened in mind** to receive the Holy Spirit;  
to be **liberated** from our daily tensions,  
to be **unbound** from our heaviness,  
to be **restored** to wholeness,  
to be **accepting** of **all** people, whomever they may be. \_\_\_\_

\*Our Gospel reading today begins with Jesus trying to escape  
from the crowds of people in **Galilee** who wanted to make him **king**;  
**and also**, from the **church officials** who were **angry** with him  
for challenging the laws and customs  
*they* had long established within **their** society. \_\_\_\_

Jesus needed to get away. Jesus needed some **privacy**.

And so he traveled **north-west** of Galilee into the **Gentile** region of **Tyre**.

He was planning on quietly slipping into a house **unrecognized**;  
to relax, to chill out, to unwind ... to find “some space.” \_\_\_\_

So what happened? ...

**Saint Mark** tells us Jesus could not escape notice, even in this foreign land.

A woman of **Syrophoenician** heritage  
    **recognized** Jesus,  
    **threw** herself at his feet,  
    and **begged** him *repeatedly* to cure her daughter of an unclean spirit.

She was **persistent** in seeking Jesus' help.  
She knew that Jesus - the Son of God - could save her daughter. \_\_\_\_

\*Now what transpired next still baffles people to this day.

The way Jesus first responded to this woman  
    does **not** sound like the peaceful, meek, gentle Jesus  
    most of us picture him to be.  
Here he sounds rather **rude** and **impatient**. \_\_\_\_

(Please note that the Gospel of **Mark** is known for showing more readily  
    the **human** side of Jesus as compared to the other **three** Gospel accounts.) \_\_\_\_

Mark writes that Jesus answered this woman by saying:  
    “Let the **children** be fed first,  
    for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs.” ...

In other words, Jesus was saying:  
    “I am here to minister to the **Jewish** people first,  
    and not to *degenerates* like you!”

... Did Jesus truly feel that **partial** toward the **Gentiles**;  
or was he merely **imitating** the *biased thoughts* of the **Jewish** people  
    in an effort to teach them a lesson? ...

Well truthfully, I do not know. \_\_\_\_

Perhaps Jesus was just **tried** and **grumpy** that day. \_\_\_\_

But in the Jewish culture of 1<sup>st</sup> century **Palestine**,  
    to refer to someone as a *dog* was indeed a **cruel insult!** \_\_\_\_

Unlike **Syrophoenician** culture where some people had **dogs** as **pets** in their homes,  
    in **Jewish** culture, **dogs** were **scavengers** that ran wild in the streets.

Now this woman could have walked away hurt, angry, and embarrassed,  
but instead she responded **gracefully** by saying:  
    “Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs.” ...

She was not asking to completely take Jesus away  
from ministering to the **Jewish** people.  
She only wanted a moment of his time ... a few crumbs  
... and not for herself, but for the **welfare** of her daughter. \_\_\_\_

And Jesus was **pleased** by this woman's reply and instantly healed her daughter.

She had "opened the minds" of others to look beyond their **prejudices**  
and accept **all** people as children of God.

It was as if she said

- as Jesus would soon tell the deaf man from the region of the **Decapolis** -  
"**Ephphatha!** Be opened! Hear and understand!" ...

\*But what about us? Are we **open** to accept others for who they are?

Do we **hear** and **understand**

... or are we caught up in our own **selfish** thoughts and desires? ...

Are we living our lives **modeled** after Jesus Christ? ...

Throughout the Gospels, we hear of Jesus assisting **all** kinds of people,  
which **bucked** the system in those days!

In first century Palestine:

**men** did not talk with **women** in public,  
**Jews** did not associate with the **Gentiles**,  
and **children** were considered **obscure** and of **no value**.

Here, Jesus not only **converses** with a **woman** in public, but she is a **Gentile**.  
And because of her faith and persistency,  
Jesus heals her daughter, a little **child**. \_\_\_\_

Furthermore, it is good to point out,

that the **Decapolis** - where Jesus healed the man who was deaf and mute -  
this was also mainly a **Gentile** sector of the country.

(Although some Jewish families lived in this region who lived a **Hellenistic** lifestyle.)

... Jesus reaches out to **all** people of **every** race. \_\_\_\_

\*In our **second** reading today, James **also** tells us to open up ... **EPHPHTHA!**

He writes: "Don't make distinctions between the poor and wealthy.

Don't judge. Don't show partiality.

Love your neighbor as yourself. Show **mercy** toward others." ...

James asks: “My brothers and sisters, do you with your acts of favoritism *really believe* in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ?” ...

Through **baptism** into Christ,  
we are reminded that we are all equal in the sight of the Lord.  
God created us and loves us all just the way we are!

We are called **not** to **reject** but **rejoice** in the **diversity** of people.  
We are called to gather as a **community** at the Lord’s Table;  
celebrating the Eucharist without **discrimination** or **reserve**. \_\_\_\_

\***Psalm 146**, informs us:  
the Lord **sets free**, the Lord **lifts up**, the Lord **loves**,  
the Lord **cares**, the Lord **sustains**. ...

As Christians, we are called to do the same.

If we see someone **bound by troubled thoughts**,  
– through the guidance of the Holy Spirit,  
take the time to share the Gospel with that person to set them **free**.

If we see someone **feeling down and depressed**,  
– through the guidance of the Holy Spirit,  
take the time to **lift** that person up and bring **joy** into their life.

If we see someone **angry and bitter**,  
– through the guidance of the Holy Spirit,  
share your **love** with that person to **lighten** their heart.

If we see someone **feeling alone and abandoned**,  
– through the guidance of the Holy Spirit,  
show that person how much you **care** by taking time to **visit** with them.

And if we see someone **who has lost a loved one**,  
– through the guidance of the Holy Spirit,  
be there for that person  
to help **comfort** and **sustain** them through their difficult time. \_\_\_\_

\*Like Jesus, there may be times we need to get away;  
to seek some privacy, to **rejuvenate**.

We may even run to a foreign country as he did,  
figuring no one will know us there and we will be left alone. \_\_\_\_

But if a need arises - and we can help in the situation -  
find the strength to step **forward** in a kind and gentle way  
and **help** your neighbor.

Put aside **bigotry** and harsh remarks ... and **willingly** assist those in need;  
whether they be red, yellow, black, white, male, female,  
Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, Jewish, Atheist,  
straight, gay, or whatever. \_\_\_\_

The Lord has blessed each and everyone of us with **gifts** and **talents** to share.

Do not be **partial** with whom you decide to share these gifts with,  
but **freely give** of yourself to all people, expecting **nothing** in return. \_\_\_\_

\*May the Holy Spirit open our eyes  
to experience both the **depressed** as well as the **uplifted** in this world.

May the Holy Spirit open our ears  
to hear other people's **joys and sorrows**.

May the Holy Spirit open our mouth  
to voice our concerns to those in authority.

And may the Holy Spirit open our hearts  
to our sisters and brothers throughout the world,  
encouraging all to join together in **unity**  
for the well-being of God's whole creation. \_\_\_\_

\*We can all experience our **minds** and **hearts**  
being opened to receive the Holy Spirit:  
being **liberated** from our daily tensions,  
being **unbound** from our heaviness,  
being **restored** to completeness,  
being **accepted** by all people ...

thru keeping focused  
on the one who suffered on the cross for **our** sake,  
on the one who is our ultimate **model** of how to relate with others,  
on the one who loves us just the way we are!  
... On **Jesus Christ**, our **Sanctifier** and **Redeemer**! \_\_\_\_

\*And so I proclaim to you: "**Ephphatha!** Be opened!"

Christ is present in our hearts, leading us forth in mission;  
to share his gracious Gospel of **Forgiveness** and **Salvation** with all people! Amen.