

28 September 2003  
Pentecost 16

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

## Jesu Juva

“Opened Ears Point to an Opened Heaven”

Text: Mark 7:31-37

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

*Which is worse:* not being able to hear, or having ears that hear and listening to the juicy gossip about your neighbor?

*Which is worse:* not being able to speak, or speaking blasphemously against God?

*Which is worse:* not being able to see, or using your eyes to feed the lust of your mind?

*Which is worse:* not being able to walk, or using healthy legs to go where you should not be?

*Which is worse:* being diseased of body, or diseased of soul?

I dare say that most people in our world today would answer those questions differently than God. Perhaps even many, or most, of us. The sin *within*, the sin of our soul that we cannot see, is for most, not nearly as important as the sin *without* – the ravages of sin that we can see. And so many would rather murder themselves and end their lives than live a life with an outward quality somewhat less than they desire. Many want to create and then kill babies in order to harvest their stem cells in hopes of a cure for paralysis and other diseases. Many want science to continue to do things simply because we *can*, without ever stopping to think whether or not we *should*.

But *which is worse?*

Today we heard of Jesus healing and restoring a man who was deaf and mute – he could not hear and he could not speak. This is not, as we have come to learn, so unusual. The Son of God in the person of Jesus Christ healed many of all kinds of diseases. He also gave the blind their sight, and made the lame to walk. He healed fevers and leprosy. He drove out demons and raised the dead. And the Scriptures tell us of *only a few* of the total number of these miracles. Clearly, Jesus was both *willing* and *able* to heal and give these

people restoration of life and health.

And so many people today expect the same thing. As Christians, we regularly pray for God to heal people. There are bumper stickers that say “Expect a miracle.” And certainly God can and does heal people still today, and is performing miracles – probably more frequently than we know or acknowledge. . . . But there are also those whom He does not heal. The blind, the deaf, the paralyzed, the sick and suffering – they are all still among us today. Certainly the Almighty God is just as able to heal people today as He was back in the time and ministry of Jesus! So why doesn’t He? It all seems terribly unfair, doesn’t it? Some are healed and some are not. Some have plenty and some live in need. Some live to a good old age and some lives are snuffed out early. And because of all this, God can *seem* mighty capricious and arbitrary! Why some and not others? Why this one and not that one? . . . Who among us hasn’t asked those kinds of questions?

But those are the questions of those who can only see what is happening *without*, and not what is happening *within*. But the One who can see what is within us just as clearly as what is outside of us, asks in the very next chapter of Mark’s Gospel, “[**But**] **what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his life?**” (Mark 8:36) Or, to paraphrase that a bit: What does it profit a man to avoid suffering in this life, only to receive it in the next? Or, what does it profit you to gain your health but lose your faith?

No, there is a greater miracle that God desires for you (and for all!) than simply the restoration of health or strength or hearing or eyesight – and that is the miracle of forgiveness. The cleansing and healing and restoration of your soul. And while we do not often refer to that as a “miracle,” is it not? Is not forgiveness much more than mere words? For if a miracle is defined as the supernatural working of God in this world, counteracting the laws of nature, is this not what forgiveness does, since we are all – as we confessed again at the beginning of the service today – by nature sinful and unclean?

And so when we hear or read of the miracles of Jesus in healing and restoring those with all kinds of sicknesses and disabilities and diseases, it should be with this in mind – that these miracles are not an end in themselves, but are serving a greater purpose. Jesus did not come to be a “miracle-working-Santa Claus,” but used these miracles to point us to this greater miracle that He comes to accomplish and work in us. The miracle of His forgiveness.

And it is the prophet Isaiah in the Old Testament reading that connects these two things for us today and enables us to see this reality. For first Isaiah speaks of the “**vengeance**” and the “**recompense**” of God – or in other words, His *wrath* and *pay back* against sin. And with these things, says Isaiah, with vengeance and recompense, with wrath and pay

back, ***“He will come and save you.”*** And that is a description of the cross. For there, upon His Son, God poured out all of His anger and wrath, His vengeance and recompense, for all the sin in this world – all that sin that ever was, and all the sin that ever will be. He held nothing back, but punished His Son with the full punishment that our sins deserved. And Jesus, lovingly and obediently accepting it in our place, dying our death and then rising to life again, **saved us**. He saved us from the wrath. He saved us from the pay back. He saved us from our sins. He saved us from the grave. He saved us from Satan. And He saved us not just for this life, but for eternal life.

But Isaiah doesn't end there, for he then points to the signs – the miracles – of how we will know that this One, this Saviour, has come. How will we know that this great forgiveness and salvation has come. We will know for ***“Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy.”*** When these things happen we will know – we will know God has come to save us. And that He is working in us, miraculously, to save us.

And when we, by faith, are forgiven, and receive the wonderful gift and miracle of God's forgiveness, we are healed in these and many other ways! Our **ears** are opened to hear His Word; our **tongues** are loosed to sing His praise; our **eyes** begin to see His work in the world; our **legs** are strengthened from the weakness of fear and despair; our calloused and sinful **hearts** are cut and healed; our **minds** unveiled to understand His Word and His wisdom. *Is that not a miracle?* The working of God in us, to rescue us from the sin and trappings of this world, and lead us to Himself, where there is life.

And we understand that there are far more important things in this world than ears than can simply hear. Far more important are ears that hear the Word of God.

There are more important things than simply tongues that speak. Far more important are mouths that receive the body and blood of Jesus and tongues that confess His Name and truth.

There are more important things than legs that walk and work. Far more important are hearts and minds that bow and kneel in repentance and faith, to receive the gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation.

There are more important things than eyes that can simply see. For more important are eyes that can see the working of God in the waters of Holy Baptism, making children of God out of sinners, driving away the devil, giving faith, and forgiving sins.

All of that is the work of God that you have received, even though you may, for a while, suffer in this world, and struggle under many hardships and persecutions – both physical and spiritual. But suffering and struggling does not mean that you have been short changed! For there was a *much greater* “**Ephphatha**” that your Saviour Jesus Christ spoke, a *much greater* “opening” that He has provided for you – provided when He cried out from the cross: “**tetelestai – it is finished.**” For then it was not simply ears that were opened, but Heaven itself. And so now by faith, Heaven is opened to you.

In the Name of the Father and of the (+) Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.