

Jesu Juva

“Hearing and Speaking”

Text: Mark 7:31-37 (Isaiah 35:4-7a; James 2:1-10, 14-18)

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

There were two miracles that happened that day we heard about in the Holy Gospel; two gifts given - the gift of hearing *and* the gift of speaking. I think we often overlook that second one, but Mark makes it clear: the man was deaf *and* couldn't speak; he had a speech impediment. Jesus touched both his ears and his tongue. And the people marveled because Jesus *makes the deaf hear and the mute speak*, fulfilling the words of the prophet Isaiah.

Two gifts given. Two gifts that always go together in fact. For you learn to speak by hearing, by repeating the sounds and words you hear from your parents. When you're little, when you're a baby, they speak to you and you try to speak back, copying them. And it takes a while; you don't talk straight out of the womb! Children first learn to make sounds, then try to form them into words. For it isn't easy for tongue and lips, breath and vocal cords to all work together and bring forth not just sounds, but words. That's part of the reason why the people were so amazed that day. This man began speaking plainly *right away*. And so not just his hearing but also his speaking were clearly the work of God. *Gifts*.

So it is with you as well. Already as early as the fourth or fifth century, the Church in some places added that Aramaic word *ephphatha* to its baptismal liturgy to indicate that in those waters, Jesus is touching you, performing a miracle in you, giving you gifts, just as he did for that man. That now, you hear God's Word and speak God's Word too. And a few years later, when Luther came along and was doing some reforming - including of some clutter than had gotten into the baptismal rite and was obscuring what was happening there - the *ephphatha* he kept. It wasn't necessary. It wasn't an essential part of the sacrament. But it was a good witness, a good testimony, to what was happening.

For still today, we speak what we hear. God speaks, and we listen and learn to speak back. God gives us His Word of Law which says you are a sinner; and we learn to speak back: *yes, Lord, I am a sinner. This is the truth. I confess that I am a poor miserable sinner*. But that's not all. God also gives us His Word to reveal to us who He is - the Holy Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He tells us that He is our creator, redeemer, and sanctifier; and we learn to speak the Creed: *yes, Lord. I believe in God the Father Almighty . . . and in Jesus Christ, Your only Son, our Lord . . . and I believe in the Holy Spirit. This is the truth*. Jesus speaks to us His Word of absolution: You are forgiven all your sins. And hearing, we learn to speak back: *Amen. Yes, yes, this is the truth. Gift*

received. Jesus also teaches us to pray, how? By giving us the words, His Word; and hearing we speak back: *Our Father, who art in heaven*. And we have His promise that His ears are always open to hear our prayers; to all prayers prayed in the name of Jesus. Hearing and speaking is also the pattern of the Catechism, and it is what you sang last week in the beginning of Matins: *O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise* (Psalm 51:15).

That's what happened that day in the region of Tyre and Sidon. The Lord opened his lips.

And once he started speaking, there was no shutting him up! That sometimes happens with children too. Once they get this speaking thing figured out, they often want to talk to everybody. Now Mark doesn't tell us exactly who it was who Jesus *charged to tell no one* - Mark just says "*them*," indicating perhaps both the man who received these gifts, and those who witnessed them given. But they just couldn't stop talking about it.

Interestingly, we today tend to have the opposite problem - we don't talk too much, we tend to talk *too little* about Jesus and all that He has done for us. Whether it's from shame or fear or worry, because Christians have increasingly become targets of abuse and ridicule, or because of rules about what can or cannot be said at work or school, there seems now to be a tendency to be hesitant and reluctant to speak of Jesus in public. To speak of sin and forgiveness. To speak of creation and re-creation. To speak of evil and the need for redemption. To confess the one and only true God in the face of so many false gods. It's as if the devil has stuck his finger into our ears and spat and touched our tongues and said: **be closed!**

Or if our ears and mouths aren't closed, then to fill them with words and thoughts and truths that are not truths at all; words that aren't worth repeating, though we do. Teaching us not the wisdom of God but the wisdom of the world. Words that do not praise and confess God, but which praise and confess ourselves. Words that do not help but hurt; that do not build up but drag down; that do not forgive but ridicule, condemn, and belittle. Perhaps we should expect that from the world, from unbelievers, from those who know not their Saviour and His gifts. But from Christians? From us? That should not be. But how often is it? Sinning, as we confess, not only by our deeds, but with our thoughts and in our words.

And with that our faith is shown, isn't it? As James said. **Words and deeds confess what the heart believes**. It's not that we're unbelievers - it's that we are weak at times and strong at times. Timid at times and bold at times. Active at times and stagnant at times. Trusting at times and fearful at times. Truth is, we're all over the place. Up and down, sinners and saints both. That, too, is what God has told us in His Word, and what we confess: sinners by birth, saints by the new birth from above. Sons and daughters of men and sons of God. One foot in the grave and one foot in eternity. Caught in the tensions

between the now and the not yet - children of God *now*, but *not yet* delivered from this body and world of sin.

We're inconsistent and unreliable. And so we sang just before the sermon today words from Psalm 146 (LSB #797 v.3): *Trust not in rulers; they are but mortal; Earthborn they are and soon decay.* Trust not in yourself either, what you can do. Don't rely on yourself and on your changing and doing better. You're earthborn and decaying too. Instead, *Place all your trust in Christ, our Lord*, the hymn, the psalm, said.

Place all your trust in the one who spoke the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth of God. The one whose thoughts, words, and deeds were all in accord and perfect. The one you can rely on always, even when who He was and what He said got Him nailed to a cross. He did not waver or shrink back. He said He would do it and He did. He said He would die for your sins and He did. He said He would then rise from the dead and He did. He said He would ascend for you and He did. He said He will not leave you and He hasn't. He said He will be with you always and He is. And He said He will come back for you and He will. These are the words He has spoken and fulfilled. These are the words He has spoken to you, to hear and believe. To hear and to speak. To say: *Amen. Yes, Lord. Truth. Lord I believe; help my unbelief* (Mark 9:24).

And He does. For that gift He keeps on giving, here, in His Word, in His Supper. The gift of faith, strengthening us as we struggle in this world and life. The gift of forgiveness for all the times we fail and fall. The gift of life in the midst of a world of people seeking only their own lives. The gift of salvation, a promised future that will last far beyond just what there is here and now. All in Jesus, who here says: I am giving you My Body and Blood as My pledge, to sustain you now, and to strengthen you in the confidence, in the faith, that you are mine and I am yours. All these gifts are yours for I not only give them to you - *I give you Myself*.

And hearing that, such promises, we speak, we confess, and we rejoice. All that we need we have, and all that we have is gift from Him. Gifts that you now can also give. Speaking forgiveness, speaking the faith, speaking in love. Not because God needs you to, but because your neighbor needs you to. Maybe to believe. Maybe so that they too can speak because they are afraid, maybe they are reluctant as well, and so just need your encouragement; to know there's another Christian around; they're not the only one. You never know what these gifts can do. Far more abundantly than we think or imagine.

That day in the region of Tyre and Sidon, Jesus gave gifts. Here, too, the same. So speak, O Lord! And help us to speak in praise and love. Or as we sang:

*Praise, all you people, the name so holy
Of Him who does such wondrous things!
All that has being, to praise Him solely,*

*With happy heart its amen sings.
Children of God, with angel host
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost!
Alleluia, alleluia (LSB #797, v. 5)!*

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