

PENTECOST 16 (2018)
Mark 7

O Lord, open my lips and my mouth will declare your praise.

Make haste, O God, to deliver me; make haste to help me, O Lord!

Mark 7:31–37 Then he returned from the region of Tyre and went through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis. *And they brought to him a man who was deaf and had a speech impediment, and they begged him to lay his hand on him. And taking him aside from the crowd privately, he put his fingers into his ears, and after spitting touched his tongue.* And looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, “Ephphatha,” that is, “Be opened.” And his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. And Jesus charged them to tell no one. But the more he charged them, the more zealously they proclaimed it. And they were astonished beyond measure, saying, “He has done all things well. He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak.”

In the Name of Jesus.

Who needs Jesus’ hand? In the crowd, some singled out one fella: THIS ONE would surely benefit from the touch of YOUR hand!

AWAY from the crowd, not just His HAND! But we get a good chunk of the Man-God's anatomy in today's report! His finger—in the man's ears! Spit from HIS OWN MOUTH—and touching the other man's tongue. Eyes to heaven; airway full of sighing; and then the voice—even the very word our Savior spoke in His contemporary Aramaic: Ephphatha! Be opened!

And the man whom the crowd figured needed Jesus' help was helped that day. And a fella like ME is glad; and y'all aren't that much better off than I am and have every reason to be glad too! To believe!

The one--the ONES--targeted by fingers, mouths, eyes of men—he, they, WE are ATTRACTIVE to the fingers of Jesus that were then splayed on the cross of shame. Perhaps the man himself wanted clearer ears and tongue; we're not told! But he got 'em!

'It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.'

All mouths and fingers, eyes and sighs are called to repentance today—AND FAITH! Joy and GLADNESS that HEAVEN has dived right into us—right down to our fingers, now redeemed fingers, baptized fingers!—to answer the call, the finger-pointing, the heavenward sighs that there is something OFF about the next man, as we ALL can PLAINLY see! And to the wonder of ALL: Heaven showed up! Heaven shows up still!

Why did the crowd want to improve that man's ears and mouth? I have a suspicion! The Romans taught me this!

Y'all know that Roman numerals began as sign-language? One is one finger; the five a full hand; ten is the two hands together, one V up and one V down. The reason is clear.

One of the great things about the old Romans is that they were as obvious and committed idolaters as the world has ever known! Whatever they called 'god' was called upon in a type of barter, exchange: 'I'll make a lot of noise about YOU, o god, draw the eyes of a crowd, maybe even their money! But HERE is what I NEED from YOU!'

The old Romans didn't even PRETEND to have the phony VENEER other religions of the world lightly drape on their self-centeredness: spirituality, other-worldliness; bah! The Romans knew that no matter WHERE men AIMED their eyes, hearts, treasure, their TRUE AIM was the benefit the man, the old, wicked sinner, right HERE AND NOW!

So they were open to trading and working with ANY people of their world—as long as those people could BENEFIT them in some way! A simple definition of 'idolatry' is to make a GOD out of what is NOT God! To make of Creation a glory that belongs to the Creator.

But what to do when other people don't know their LATIN?! ESPECIALLY down at the docks, the trading posts full of foreigners? 'HOW AM I GOING TO BENEFIT FROM THESE PEOPLE IF THEY DON'T UNDERSTAND ME?!'

As I've fallen for myself! In the company of those who do not know your language, we first SLOW DOWN our speaking—because people are clearly dumb, and cannot speak our language! 'Where.....is.....the.....bath.....room.....????!!'

If still no answer, the man must be deaf! So, we turn up the volume! 'THE BATHROOM! WHERE?!'

If we come to our senses, we move from insult to Roman practicality: sign language, about what we need and want; for what we are DESPERATE! So the Romans used their fingers to speak, used their fingers so others could hear: for THEIR OWN BENEFIT! (Oh! The Romans were US!)

We slow down our speech, my dear ones—when? When the people with whom we are speaking—debating?—arguing?—dueling?---they are CLEARLY NOT UNDERSTANDING and need some HELP! Does anyone ELSE see this? Does Heaven?!

Next step? The volume! Maybe DEAFNESS is the problem.

Why did the crowd want the man's ears and tongue improved? They had things to TELL him! They had things to SELL him! They had things—to YELL at him????

So the first thing Jesus did was save the man from the crowd. And then: not treating the man as slow; not even treating the man as DEAF—He SPOKE to him!—He gently sign-linguaged to the man, his ears—how gently did He move His fingers there? His tongue—have you and I EVER been gentle enough with the next man for the next man to allow THAT? I know we desire to REACH DOWN A MAN'S MOUTH AND GRAB his tongue! Compare Jesus' touch!

He even motions to heaven, to tell the man that what is now OPEN is God, HIS God! Only THEN were the ears open and the mouth opened to declare Heaven's praise!

If we are not careful with our sighs to heaven about others, my dear ones, heaven might just pay special attention to those we conclude are WAY OFF and treat them gentle, as Heaven's ONLY CONCERN!

Or it may be our VOLUME that moves the good Physician to heal and save our TARGETS! Maybe even our CONDESCENSION!

Why does your poor pastor bring up to you without end the Small Catechism of Doctor Martin Luther? I s'pose there's two reasons. Let's get the repentance out of the way. No doubt, somewhere inside me, I'm upset that people are not as conversant with the Commandments, the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, their Baptism, as I FIGURE people should be! Pray for your poor minister! The GOSPEL is not intended to be SHOUTED DOWN anyone's ears! Help me repent!

But when I AM doing my calling properly, I am touching your ears with the fingers of Jesus, touching your tongue, and directing your gaze to heaven: with the Word! To offer to all here and whoever else will listen, that the Lord will INDEED listen to the prayer to open our ears, our mouths: that we may praise NOT the Creation, but the Creator! The Small Catechism teaches the Church that the Living God is WAY AHEAD OF US, when it comes to making haste to help those who need help!

My feelings doctor has truly helped me understand the verse: Be angry and do not sin! I think I was not listening to the first part of the verse; only the second! And PRETENDING that I was NOT angry with others; and thus TRYING NOT to sin, by ignoring problems or injuries, real or imagined.

My dear ones: Who is not hearing you? Who is not understanding, saying what YOU need them to say? Do we need to travel far? Far from your home? Your DNA? Your circle of friends? Do we need to look outside this church building? Do we need to look past your pew?

Be angry! The Bible ORDERS IT! But a sinless anger: meaning, the LOVE that dares to touch ears and tongue so gently, moving all our eyes and hearts to the heaven in which the Crucified, Risen and Ascended King of the Cross now reigns!

With NO VOLUME, to speak to those who cannot hear us!

By spitting out what's bad in OUR MOUTHS—Follow ME! He cries!----Spitting out of OUR mouths—and taking IN, INSTEAD, His Body given for us, His Blood shed for us, for MANY!

Then OUR MOUTHS may make the next mouth burst into songs of deliverance, songs of joy! When OUR MOUTHS have been filled with the highest praise of heaven! Christ's Body and His Blood!

The Small Catechism teaches us this Gospel. So does the liturgy. So does the Creed. So do our hymns and prayers, our mutual, brother and sister conversation and consolation. The Gospel rings clear in the Psalms too, doesn't it? For those who have fingers and volume aimed at them, from without, or from within:

O Lord, open my lips and my mouth will declare your praise.

Make haste, O God, to deliver me; make haste to help me, O Lord!

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit; as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.