

Twelfth Sunday after Trinity

St. Mark 7.31-37

August 30, 2020

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

I always travel with some small Bluetooth speakers. Last year, crossing the border from Israel into Egypt, they were confiscated. “You can get them back when you leave.” I’m not making this up. I figured I’d never see them again.

I told my friend Nabil. He’s a Lutheran pastor, but more importantly in this situation, he’s Palestinian. His first language is Arabic. We marched me right back to the entry point, and after he called everybody “Habibi” and talked to a supervisor, we got my speakers back. I had to sign a document promising not to play loud music while in Egypt. I’m not making this up.

On the way back to our hotel, Nabil said to me, “Why did you bring this? I told you only bring what you need. You don’t need this.” “But Nabil, *habibi*, I do! Life is too short to listen to music out of bad speakers!” He was unpersuaded.

Yet more important than the quality of the audio is the quality of the ears. “**Take care then how you hear,**” says Jesus in Luke 8(:18). There are two parts to hearing: the bodily workings of the ear in perceiving sound, and the mind that takes the Word to heart. That’s a problem we all share.

Therefore, when Jesus takes aside the man who is deaf and has an impediment in his speech, He takes aside all of humanity. Which means, when Jesus confronts the man who is deaf and has an impediment in his speech, Jesus confronts us. For you and I have several problems: like the man in today’s Gospel, our bodies don’t work right – not the way they were created to work.

But the physical problems are symptoms of the deeper problem. The wages of sin is death, and our dying, broken bodies are symptoms of our broken souls and wounded psyches. When we heard the prophet Isaiah talking about the coming day of the LORD, he didn't just say that the deaf would hear. He said, **"In that day the deaf shall hear the words of a book,"** meaning, Holy Scripture, the Word of God.

Some of you have problems hearing, and need a hearing aid. But every one of us has a problem listening to the Book, i.e., listening to the Word of God. And we have an impediment of speech. We say things we should not, and we fail to say the things we ought. We say cruel things, hurtful things, betray confidences. And we tell lies, flatter others to get ahead, tell people what they want to hear.

What is terrifying is that Jesus says we will be judged for every one of those words. **"By your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned."** Is it surprising then that when the disciples of Jesus heard the Law from Jesus, the real meaning of the Commandments, they said, **"Who then can be saved?"**

Sometimes, upon reflection, we want to take back our words. My favorite keyboard shortcut on the Mac is "Command z" – it undoes whatever mistake I just made. But there's no edit feature on Twitter, and there's no way to unspeak what we have spoken. Our words reflect what is really in our hearts: **"Out of the abundance of the heart,"** Jesus says, **"the mouth speaks."** Even the hastily spoken words, the words blurted out without thinking, will be judged. **"I tell you,"** says our Lord, **"on the day of judgment men will render account for every careless word they utter."**

That is why St. Paul today calls the Ten Commandments, the words **"carved in letters on stone,"** the **"ministry of death."** The Commandments show us our sin, they reveal to us how we have not loved God with our whole heart, how we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. God's Law is a ministry of death, declaring to us that we deserve nothing but hell.

But God saw this wretched state that we are in. He sees our dying bodies and has compassion. He sees our twisted souls, the addictions and depression and vanities and emptiness – He sees the entire mess mankind has made of the world and says, “I will enter into it and take it upon Myself. I will die man’s death in his place. By a tree mankind was tempted and fell; so by a tree, by the cross, I will restore mankind.” And so Jesus takes this man who cannot hear and cannot speak rightly, He takes him aside and with him takes us, and He sighs, He groans. Showing what? That He is sad for us. He knows what man was meant to be, He knows more than we can fathom how far we have fallen, how corrupt we are, how inhuman we have become.

How long did this man have to suffer before Jesus came to him? Most likely a long time – perhaps all his life. God allows us to suffer for reasons we often do not understand. But we know that He is working even our suffering for our good, and that through it we learn to call upon God and rely solely upon Him. He is training us to say, “**Make haste, O God, to deliver me!**”, and look no where else for help and deliverance.

This story today is given for our comfort – that Jesus has compassion on you and hurts with you even if your suffering has gone on your whole life. That love and compassion God has for you and for all mankind is what is meant when Jesus groans and sighs when He takes this suffering man aside. And then, He who fashioned man from the earth in the beginning, touches this man’s ears and tongue and makes them whole again, with a Word. The Word of God does what it says. So when Jesus says in Aramaic, “*Ephphatha*,” “**Be opened**,” the man’s ears are opened, and his tongue loosed. Because He says, “**This is My body**,” it is His body. Because He says, “**I forgive you all your sins**,” they are forgiven. Because He says, “On the last day I will raise up your body from the grave,” it shall be raised up. That is the power of God’s Word. It does what it says.

It is a power that undoes all the damage we have done with our words. Our words have torn down, but His Word restores. Our words merit death, but His Word brings life. Our words bring pain to others and ourselves, but His Words bring healing. So the Word we cling to now is His Word of promise, and we spend the rest of our days in this broken world repeating again and again, **“Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.”**

So rejoice, my friends. The Lord JESUS has done all things well, and He will do all things well for you, in His own time.

In the Name of Jesus.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

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