

Text: Mark 7:31 - 37 (NIV)

³¹Then Jesus left the vicinity of Tyre and went through Sidon, down to the Sea of Galilee and into the region of the Decapolis. ³²There some people brought to him a man who was deaf and could hardly talk, and they begged him to place his hand on the man. ³³After he took him aside, away from the crowd, Jesus put his fingers into the man's ears. Then he spit and touched the man's tongue. ³⁴He looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him, "*Ephphatha!*" (which means, "Be opened!"). ³⁵At this, the man's ears were opened, his tongue was loosened and he began to speak plainly. ³⁶Jesus commanded them not to tell anyone. But the more he did so, the more they kept talking about it. ³⁷People were overwhelmed with amazement. "He has done everything well," they said. "He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak."

Theme: Be Opened

As I paged through Mark's Gospel this past week, I noticed many times when Jesus performed a miracle with just one word. For instance in chapter 1, He cast a demon from a man with one word in Greek, "Be quiet!" Later He heals a man of leprosy with one word, "Be clean."

In this text Jesus also uses one word, "Be opened." But there is something peculiar to this miracle. The New Testament was written in the Greek language, but Jesus spoke Aramaic, which is similar to Hebrew. There are three times in his Gospel that Mark wants to let us know the exact words that Jesus spoke. Those three times are first in chapter 5 when he went to the daughter of Jairus, who had died, and said, "Talitha koum," which means "Little girl, get up." When Jesus was hanging on the cross and about to die, Mark writes that the Lord cried out, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken Me?" In our text Jesus says "Ephphatha," which means "Be opened." It was important to Mark that we know the exact word that Jesus used as He healed this man.

I. Christ opened the man's ears and tongue.

By doing so, Christ was freeing Him from a bondage of the devil. Jesus took the man away from the crowd, so that the miracle would be done in private. He began with some sign language. He touched the man's ears and his tongue, to show that He was about to heal that condition. Then the Lord looked into heaven. He was showing the man where the power to do this miracle was coming from.

Then comes something, which I find significant. Jesus sighed deeply. There is only one other time when I can think of Jesus uttering a sigh. That is in the very next story when the pharisees asked him for a sign from heaven right after He fed the 4,000. (8:12) The misery and the unbelief that Jesus saw and experienced troubled Him greatly. So many people with almost every ailment imaginable were brought to Him. His heart went out to every one of them. He never healed anyone to put on a great show. He did it because of the pity that He felt for those who were suffering. In this way He really did bear our griefs and carry our sorrows. The pain, sickness, trouble, sin, and unbelief that the devil brought into this world broke His heart. He saw how the devil had this world bound in sin and evil.

With one word, "Ephphatha," (be opened!) He loosed this man from the devil's grip. Possibly for the very first time in this man's life he could hear. He was suddenly able to speak clearly. When the people saw what Jesus had done, they exclaimed, "He has done everything well!"

The Lord frees us from that same bondage. Christ sees all the things that are going on in the world today. He sees the sin, the suffering, the greed, the addictions, the ailments, the grief, and the unbelief. The devil almost seems to have the world in His grasp. Jesus also knows our personal trials. He knows what temptations that you struggle with. He knows what sins you feel guilty about and which you try to hide. He knows when you feel weak and don't think that you can continue on any longer. He know your ailments. He even knows which people try to make your life miserable. The devil has his sights on each one of us. He would love to have us in his grasp and destroy our faith.

When Jesus sees both our spiritual and physical struggles, His heart goes out to us too. The Lord also says, "Be opened," today, and we are freed from all the power of the devil. Jesus has given His church the keys to the kingdom of heaven. He told the disciples, "*Whatever You loose on earth, will be loosed in heaven.*" There His was speaking of the forgiveness of sins. When we confess our sins, we hear that blessed word of God, "The Lord has forgiven your sin." It is all taken away. The devil has lost his hold on us. We are released from all of the power of hell when our sins are forgiven through faith in Jesus Christ.

In Revelation 5 John saw a scroll that contained the destiny of God's people. It was sealed. At first it was in doubt whether God's people would survive all the evil of this world. Then Jesus came on the scene. Heaven begins to sing, "*You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation.*"¹⁰ *You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth.*" God's people often seem to be bound. Evil has us in its grip. Our crosses can be so heavy to bear, but Christ has opened the seal. Despite any crosses that we bear, He works all things for the good of those who love Him. He frees us from all the power of hell.

One day it will seem as though we lose the greatest battle of all. Our life on this earth will be over, but Christ will say, "Be opened" again. He will open heaven to us. We will live in His glory for all of eternity.

We each feel bound by the devil many times in our lives. Sin seems to have a hold on us. Trouble won't let us go. Eventually death will have us in its grasp, but Jesus says "Be opened." He frees us from all the power of sin, death, and the devil. He opens His kingdom to us.

II. That also opens our hearts to other people.

The man, whom Jesus healed, could have never heard about Jesus. Jesus did the best that He could with some crude sign language to show him that he would be healed by God. But on his own, this man would have never been able to seek Jesus or know that there was help through Him. His friends brought him to Jesus. They did even more than that. They begged the Lord to heal their friend. The hearts of these men who had come to know Jesus as their Savior were opened to seek the good of their friend.

They were an example of what we heard in our epistle lesson today, "*If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled,"*"

without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works is dead.” James’ point is that when God has opened the kingdom of heaven to us, we cannot help but desire that others also receive the love of God. When we see people bound in sin, our heart goes out to them. Where there is unbelief, our hearts also go out to those people. When we see people struggling financially or battling illness or grieving, our heart goes out to them. Like the friends of this man, we want to bring them to Jesus. We want them to know that Jesus wants to forgive them and given them His peace. We also want to do what we can to help and support them in their need. If the Lord has blessed us with an abundance, it is an honor to be able to give them some help. When we see misery around us, we cannot help but be troubled and pray that God will use us to open new blessings where there is suffering.

Ephphatha! It is a word that Mark wanted us to know came right from Jesus’ mouth. When He saw this man’s plight, He couldn’t help but open his ears and tongue, so that He could see and speak. God sees the misery and trouble that you have also. It breaks His heart. Trust that He has freed you from all the power of the devil. He has forgiven your sins. He promises to deliver you from every evil, and one day He will open heaven that you also may be where your Savior is.

Christ has opened heaven for us. May He give us faith in His goodness and grace for us, and open our hearts, that our faith in Christ may produce many good deeds that assure others of God’s goodness and grace for them in Jesus Christ also.

Amen.

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**Prayer of the Church
Pentecost 14 (Proper 18B)**

September 6, 2009

P We praise You, O Lord, on this Labor Day weekend for the gift of work and for the gifts and skills which shape our earthly vocations. Teach us to labor not for earthly reward but for Your glory, knowing that nothing we do in Your service is ever in vain. Give comfort and direction to the unemployed and the underemployed, that they may find work appropriate to their needs and abilities.

P We pray especially for those who labor on behalf of Your kingdom, for Gerald our Synod President, for _____ our District President, _____ our pastor(s), and for all missionaries and church workers. Bless especially those who serve You on mission fields far from home and those who bring the light of Your Word to the blind.

P We pray for our nation and those who labor on our behalf at every level of government, especially for Barack our President, _____ our Governor, and for all who serve the public trust, that they may fulfill their duties with wisdom, honor, and justice.

P We pray for the men and women of our armed forces, especially those who labor against the forces of war, terrorism, and oppression. We ask Your blessing also upon those who protect and defend us here.

P We are mindful of the many whose lives are filled with pain and suffering, grief and sorrow. As You once showed Your mercy to those who called upon You long ago, so show Your mercy to those who cry to You today. According to Your will, grant them healing and peace, especially [_____ and] those whom we name now in our hearts. (*Silence.*)

P We ask Your blessing upon those assembled today, that we who come to Your Table may faithfully receive the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ and be strengthened in faith, both now and to eternal life.

P We know Your blessings are new to us each morning. We pray You to teach us gratitude and how to use Your gifts responsibly. Accept, we pray, the tithes and offerings we bring today and the offering of our very selves made possible only in Jesus Christ.

P We recall the faithful who have gone before us and are with You, and we pray You to bring us at last with them to the everlasting life You have prepared for us in Jesus Christ. Inspire us by their faith, and encourage us by the mercy You showed to them, that we too may be found worthy of eternal life through Jesus Christ.

P We ask You for these and whatsoever things are needful for us and profitable for our salvation. Grant them to us for the sake of Jesus Christ, our Lord, in whose name we pray.

C Amen.