

Order of Worship for September 8, 2024

Prelude

P: The Lord be with you.

C: And also with you.

Opening Hymn: *"Forth in Thy Name, O Lord, I Go"* - Hymn #854

Confession and Forgiveness:

P: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

C: Amen.

P: Say to those who are of a fearful heart, "Be strong, and do not fear."

C: "Here is your God. He will come to save."

P: With ears that have been opened and tongues that speak the truth, let us confess our sins to the Lord.

P: O God, the Giver of every good and perfect gift,

C: we confess that we are imperfect. Our minds are filled with hate and prejudice; our tongues are uncontrolled; our deeds do not bear witness to our faith. As sinners we stand condemned. We plead the merits of your perfect Son, Jesus Christ, who willed and spoke and did what You command. For our sakes He obeyed; for His sake we beg forgiveness.

P: The will of God is your redemption. The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ, our Lord. In His name and for His sake I forgive you all your sins.

C: Amen

Entrance Psalm:

P: The LORD is the strength of His people;

C: He is the saving refuge of His anointed.

P: To You, O LORD, I call; my rock, be not deaf to me,

C: lest, if You be silent to me, I become like those who go down to the pit.

P: Hear the voice of my pleas for mercy, when I cry to You for help,

C: when I lift up my hands toward Your most holy sanctuary.

P: Blessed be the LORD!

C: For He has heard the voice of my pleas for mercy.

P: The LORD is my strength and my shield; in Him my heart trusts, and I am helped;

C: my heart exults, and with my song I give thanks to Him.

ALL: 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.

P: The LORD is the strength of His people;

C: He is the saving refuge of His anointed.

Prayer of the Day

P: O Lord, let Your merciful ears be open to the prayers of Your humble servants and grant that what they ask may be in accord with Your gracious will; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C: Amen.

Hymn of Praise: *“In Thee Is Gladness”*- **Hymn #818**

First Lesson: Isaiah 35:4-7

R: Say to those who have an anxious heart, “Be strong; fear not! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God. He will come and save you.”

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.

For waters break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert; the burning sand shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water lest you stumble,” says the LORD.

R: This is the Word of the Lord.

C: Thanks be to God.

Epistle Lesson: James 2:1-10, 14-18

R: My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, “You sit here in a good place,” while you say to the poor man, “You stand over there,” or, “Sit down at my feet,” have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which He has promised to those who love Him? But you have dishonored the poor man. Are not the rich the ones who oppress you, and the ones who drag you into court? Are they not the ones who blaspheme the honorable name by which you were called? If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing well. But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it. ... What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? 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. But someone will say, “You have faith and I have works.” Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.

R: This is the Word of the Lord.

C: Thanks be to God

Gospel: Mark 7:31-37

P: The Holy Gospel according to St. Mark, the 7th chapter.

C: Glory to You, O Lord.

P: Then [Jesus] 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, Jesus 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.”

P: This is the Gospel of our Lord.

C: Praise to You, O Christ.

Children’s Message (8:30)

Sermon Hymn: “O Son of God in Galilee” - Hymn #841

Sermon: “Be Opened” – Mark 7:31-37

When I was in college, I shadowed a local pastor as part of my discernment process to figure out if I wanted to be a pastor. I went with him to Bible studies and meetings, got connected with the choir and food pantry at his church, and spent time listening to the wisdom he’d gained over his years of being a pastor. One piece of advice that stuck with me is what he told me about going to seminary, graduate school for becoming a pastor. He told me I needed to remember that I was there to learn, not to show how much I already knew. I needed to be open to what I would be taught.

That’s part of coming to college, too. Even if you’ve taken AP tests or community college classes in high school, you may not know the subject matter the way your professors or TA’s here want you to know it. You have to learn how to use the library and all of the electronic resources to find information. You have to learn new programs and lab equipment. You have to be open to learning that you might not know everything already.

That’s what makes this Gospel story appropriate for this time in the year, as a new school year is still in its beginning stages. It’s a reminder that it’s in the opening of ears and eyes and minds and then, in the right order, mouths, that make a school year fruitful.

Our story finds Jesus in the area of the Decapolis, a Gentile region southeast of the Sea of Galilee. This is not home turf (Jewish territory). Jesus is a stranger and a foreigner here, although his name is not unknown. In fact, quite the opposite. As often seems to be the case, wherever he goes, Jesus’ reputation as a miracle worker seems to precede him, and his entry into a city is sure to draw a crowd eager to be healed of their various diseases and demons. So they bring to Jesus “a man who was deaf and had a speech impediment” (Mark 7:32). They want Jesus to lay hands on him in order to heal him according to his usual custom. But Jesus is not a one-size-fits-all kind of God. His compassionate care is always focused and personal. Jesus doesn’t only love the whole world. He also loves you and me—and this poor deaf and dumb man.

And so Jesus takes the man away from the crowd. He recognizes the isolation and confusion that so often attend the lives of the deaf. How do you negotiate life without one of your senses? How do you communicate with other people and engage in relationship? They did not have sign language back then! Other than a few gestures and finger pointing, how could you make yourself known to other people, let alone God?

No, Jesus doesn’t want to compound the deaf man’s discomfort by making a spectacle of him before the crowds. So he takes him aside privately and makes signs that he’s going to do

something about his problem: he stuffs his fingers into his ears and puts some of his spit on his tongue. It's almost as if Jesus is saying, "Something is about to happen."

Jesus looks up into heaven and prays, and then he looks at the man and says, "Ephphatha," which is the Aramaic word for "Be opened!" (Mark 7:34). "And," Mark tells us, "his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly." That is, he spoke rightly—in a straightforward way. Years of isolation and the walls of separation came apart. No longer would his handicap get in the way of his relationship with God or other people because Jesus healed him and made him whole. "Be opened!" he said, and his ears and mouth were opened. In fact, after the healing, the man who was healed was so excited that he couldn't even keep quiet about it!

Yet even with his ears and mouth opened, Jesus told him to close them again. Jesus told him, and the rest of the crowd, to not share what had happened. But they didn't listen, and Jesus' reputation and fame spread even more.

Why did Jesus do that? Bible scholars speak of Jesus' "messianic secret" in Mark and the way that he keeps telling people to keep quiet about his miracles until after his suffering, death, and resurrection. While some think it's a case of Jesus using reverse psychology to get news of his miracles to spread more widely, it's really because Jesus is worried they don't fully understand yet who He is and what He is doing. Only in view of the cross can the Messiah be rightly understood. Jesus didn't want people to get the wrong idea about him.

That's why it's important for us to remember why our ears and mouths are opened. GK Chesterton wrote, "The object of opening the mind, as of opening the mouth, is to shut it again on something solid." Our ears are opened to hear God's word, and then we can trust in the promises found there, building on something solid.

"Be opened!" That's what Jesus said to the deaf man with the speech problem. And that's what he says to us today: "Be opened!" Some of you may be hard of hearing. Others of us may have selective hearing! Yet even if your hearing is perfect, you might still have a hearing problem—not a physical problem, but a spiritual one. For although our ears may be in perfect working order, we still may not have ears to hear what God says to us in his Word.

It can be hard to hear God speak above the din of distractions, the various voices clamoring for our attention, and the desperation of our own anxious thoughts. It is especially difficult to hear the Lord if we do not spend time daily in Bible study and prayer. It is nearly impossible to hear God's voice if we do not gather for worship with other believers. And if we do not believe in Jesus Christ as our Savior, the spiritual silence will be deafening—and deadening. It may well be that our ears are stuffed and our mouths are stopped. We don't hear what God is saying, so neither do we know what to say in reply. Ultimately, that is what sin is all about: dulling our senses and cutting off our connection with God.

"Be opened!" Jesus commands! And by the power of his Word, our ears are opened and our tongues are loosed. By the power of his Word, the Holy Spirit creates faith in our hearts to believe in Jesus and receive his message. The Word of Christ accomplishes all things—and does them well. "Be opened!" he says, and that very Word opens our ears and hearts to receive

and believe his Word. No less amazing than the healing of the deaf man is the healing of the sinners' heart by the forgiveness Christ won for us on the cross.

Dare I therefore say to you in this place that's devoted to Christ's Word: "Ephphatha! Be opened!" Don't be deaf and hardened against what God wants to say to you about your sin, your unfaith, your unrighteousness, laziness, self-reliance, or self-satisfaction. But open your heart to His Word of wisdom, so that you can know yourself as He knows you, and so you can learn to know Him as He has revealed Himself in Christ.

It's intriguing that Mark retains the Aramaic word Jesus used in this healing, Ephphatha, giving it special significance in the story. Many of the early baptismal rites took up that word of our Lord and repeated it in the preparatory rites of Baptism. The pastor says to the child, "Be opened!" That ritual was declaring that what happened to the deaf man was now happening also to the baptized, that what Jesus said to him He says also to us. The water of Baptism is the spittle of Jesus' mouth that comes with His promise to make us His children, to separate us from the uncleanness of the world, and, crucially, to open our ears to hear. For Baptism isn't just the end of an old life, but also the beginning of a new one, one that's continuously open to hearing Christ's Word. And then that Word opens our mouths to speak it back to Him, as we sing with Psalm 51, "O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare Your praise."

And unlike the deaf man and the crowds in the Decapolis, we have no reason to keep silent or keep the Good News to ourselves. Christ has died and risen from the dead! There isn't any secret anymore—only "good news of great joy that will be for all the people." With sins forgiven and hearts made alive by the Word of God, we cannot help but speak of what we have seen and heard. So, as Jesus commands at the end of Mark's Gospel, "go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation" (Mark 16:15). "Be opened!" Amen.

Creed: Apostle's Creed

Prayer of the Church

P: Lord in your mercy,

C: hear our prayer.

8:30 AM service continues

Hymn: "*O Christ, Our True and Only Light*" - **Hymn #839**

Lord's Prayer:

The Closing Prayer:

P: Almighty and eternal God, You know our problems and our weaknesses better than we ourselves. In Your love and by Your power help us in our confusion and, in spite of our weakness, make us firm in faith; through Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord.

C: Amen.

Blessing (Pastor)

C: Amen.

Closing Hymn: *“How Wide the Love of Christ”* - **Hymn #535**

Postlude

11 AM service continues.....

Offering:

The Service of the Sacrament

P: The Lord be with you.

C: And also with you.

P: Lift up your hearts.

C: We lift them to the Lord.

P: Let us give thanks to the Lord.

C: It is right to give Him thanks and praise.

The Prayer of Thanksgiving:

P: We give thanks to You, Christ Jesus for opening the eyes of the blind, unstopping the ears of the deaf, making the mute lips sing, and making upright the lame, but even more that You have opened our hearts to Your love. Send us Your Holy Spirit so that we come to the supper of Your true body and blood trusting that by it our sins are forgiven.

C: Amen.

The Words of Our Lord:

The Lord’s Prayer:

P: The peace of the Lord be with you always.

C: Amen.

Distribution of Holy Communion:

“O Christ, Our True and Only Light” - **Hymn #839**

“Sing Praise to God, the Highest Good” - **Hymn #819**

Prayer after Communion:

P: Almighty and eternal God, You know our problems and our weaknesses better than we ourselves. In Your love and by Your power help us in our confusion and, in spite of our weakness, make us firm in faith; through Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord.

C: Amen.

Blessing: *(Pastor)*

C: Amen.

Closing Hymn: *“How Wide the Love of Christ”* - **Hymn #535**

Postlude: