

8.18.2024 Trinity 12 (Mark 7:31-37)

It's been said that Charles Wesley was never quite sure of his own birthday. He was, after all, his mother's eighteenth child, born some weeks premature, and so small and frail that they say he seemed more dead than alive. For two months he was wrapped in wool and neither cried nor opened his eyes. Wesley may have had some uncertainties concerning the exact day of his birth, but he was quite sure about the date of what he referred to as his second birth, which occurred on the day of Pentecost, May 21, 1738. On that day Wesley responded wholeheartedly to the love and grace and mercy of God, and one year later wrote a hymn to celebrate the anniversary of his conversion, a hymn titled: *O For A Thousand Tongues To Sing* (*Stories of our Favorite Hymns*, 1980, Lion Publishing).

We sang that hymn in preparation for our sermon today, because when I was reading the Gospel lesson for this Sunday, which is an account of Jesus miraculously healing a man who was deaf and dumb, the words of Wesley's fourth verse came to mind: "Hear Him, ye deaf; His praise, ye dumb, Your loosened tongues employ; Ye blind, behold your Savior come; And leap, ye lame, for joy!" The New Testament is filled with miraculous accounts of Jesus healing the deaf, the dumb, the blind, the lame, cleansing lepers, even raising the dead, and yet as we sang the words of this hymn, it's clear that Wesley wants us to recognize the truth that we were the deaf, the dumb, the blind, and the lame, who by the grace of God, were healed by our Lord in miraculous ways.

The miracles of healing that we read about in the New Testament were not merely physical, and they're not a thing of the past. Every miracle our Lord performed has a spiritual significance, a spiritual aspect that was present not only in the first century, but is present in the twenty-first century as well. In our day, Jesus heals the deaf by opening our hearts and minds to hear and receive the word of God. Today, Jesus makes the dumb speak by loosening our tongues that we may sing His praise. He makes the blind see to the end that we may behold the glory of God in His work of creation, and perceive the depth of His sacrificial love in our crucified and Risen Savior. Our Lord heals the deaf, the dumb, the blind, and the lame today, to the end that our pilgrimage, our Christian walk toward His kingdom may, by His grace, be

accomplished.

The miracles of physical healing that our Lord performed in the first century were a miraculous blessing to the suffering, the needy, the sick, and the sorrowful, and we can be certain that God still performs such miracles today, because many of us have personally witnessed or received miraculous physical healing. However, since we know that even those who are healed will eventually come to their last day on this earth, the greater miracle, the eternal miracle is found in spiritual healing, and this miracle is realized when Jesus speaks to us in the same way that He spoke to the man described in our Gospel lesson this morning. To this man, Jesus sighed and said, “*Ephphatha, that is, Be opened. And straightway his ears were opened, and the string of his tongue was loosed, and he spake plain*” (Mark 7:34-35).

Be opened, Jesus said to a man who was deaf and dumb. *Be opened*, Jesus says to us, and our Lord and God speaks these healing words to us because since the time of the Fall in the Garden of Eden, the moment when Adam and Eve opened their eyes to temptation, and their ears to the voice of the Enemy, we, their descendants, have been blind and deaf. The effects of Original Sin have left us, in a spiritual sense, unable to see, hear, speak, or walk, and it is only through the healing our Savior alone provides that our ears and eyes are opened once again, that we are raised to new life with Him, and we at last begin to set our hearts “*on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God*” (Colossians 3:1).

Now, let’s take a moment to reflect on this healing miracle Jesus performed, and consider the way such miraculous healing may be accomplished in a spiritual sense in our lives. To begin, the text tells us that they brought to Jesus “*one that was deaf, and had an impediment in his speech*” (Mark 7:32). So, the man who was deaf and dumb was brought to our Lord. We don’t know by who, whether it was a few friends or perhaps a group of people in the area who recognized his need for healing. All we know is that this man was deaf, dumb, unable to come to Jesus on his own, and that we were all at one time in the same condition.

It’s important to remember that we were each brought to the Lord for healing. Perhaps it was a parent or grandparent, a spouse or sibling, a friend or even a

human author inspired by God to write words of Scripture that brought us to this place of healing. Ultimately it is God who draws us to Himself (John 6:44, 65), but clearly He uses human instruments to do so. God uses people who were also once deaf and dumb and dying to bring others to Jesus that they may receive the same miraculous spiritual healing that has been accomplished in us. Therefore may we, who have been healed by our Lord, express our love for God and neighbor by leading others to Christ that they may also be healed, and live.

The passage we read this morning also states that when this man was brought to our Lord, Jesus “*took him aside from the multitude...*” (Mark 7:33). This may seem like a small detail, but I would suggest that in our day especially, it’s a detail of great importance. Notice, Jesus took this man aside to heal him. He separated him from the crowded, chaotic world so that he could be alone with our Lord, and if our desire is to be healed, if we want to see God, hear His voice, shout His praise, and walk in His holy ways, then we must allow the Lord to take us aside. We must place our hand in His and let Him separate us from the “*cares and riches and pleasures of this life*” (Luke 8:14), from our crowded thoughts about the troubles of today and the worries of tomorrow. We must not let the crowd keep us from the healing our Lord longs to accomplish in us. Instead, we must all set time aside to escape the crowd, and be alone with God, in a place where we can see and hear and be healed.

Finally, when Jesus took this man aside from the multitude, He “*put His fingers into his ears, and He spit, and touched his tongue; and looking up to heaven, He sighed, and saith unto him, Ephphatha, that is, Be opened.*” When we’re brought to the Lord, when we allow Him to take us away from the busy world, it is then, when we’re alone with God, that He touches us, and heals us. We know that Almighty God transcends His creation, He stands above the limits of space, time, and matter, but through the Incarnation of His Son, we also know that God is with us (Matthew 1:23), God can touch us, and in fact, He does. Here, in His church, away from the crowded, chaotic world, we commune with God at His table, we receive His touch, and “our sinful bodies are made clean by His Body... our souls are washed through His most precious Blood.” We are healed by the touch of our Lord’s Body and Blood, and forevermore we “dwell in Him and He in us.”

Two thousand years ago, a man who was deaf and had an impediment in his speech was brought to Jesus, who took him aside, and healed him with a touch. Through a hymn, written to celebrate his conversion, the day he was touched by our Lord, Charles Wesley wants us to recognize the truth that in a spiritual sense such miraculous healing still occurs today, for there was a time when we couldn't hear the voice of God, or speak His name. We were deaf and dumb and dying, but by the grace of God we were brought to our Lord, who took us aside, placed His hands upon us, and we were healed. Now, what we'd give for "a thousand tongues to sing" our dear Redeemer's praise. What we'd give to respond in such a glorious way to "the triumphs of His grace" in our lives.

We may not have a thousand tongues to sing, but we all have one, and Jesus has loosed that tongue. He has given us a voice, and a miraculous reason to use it. May we do so to His glory. May we, by His grace, "spread through all the earth abroad the honors of thy Name." Amen.