

Mark 7:31-37. ³¹ Then Jesus left the vicinity of Tyre and went through Sidon, down to the Sea of Galilee and into the region of the Decapolis. ³² There 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. ³³ After 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. ³⁴ He looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him, Ephphatha!" (which means, "Be opened!"). ³⁵ At this, the man's ears were opened, his tongue was loosened and he began to speak plainly.³⁶ Jesus commanded them not to tell anyone. But the more he did so, the more they kept talking about it. ³⁷ People were overwhelmed with amazement. "He has done everything well," they said. "He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak."

Jesus comes to you with a personal touch

1. He knows your pain.

2. He does all things well.

A new season of the NFL has kicked off and will be in full swing by this afternoon. And it is interesting to see how at least a handful of star athletes from this league have become full blown celebrities. It seems that a more than a few of these men do more than just one thing well, they do many things well. About 5 years ago a star player from the National Football League nearly qualified to play in a professional golf tournament, the US Open. And it's not just athletic skill that these men are known for, as a number of players from the National Football League are successful entrepreneurs and businessmen. Some are featured prominently in commercials and guest appearances in movies and television shows. A certain quarterback from the NFL even won a recent celebrity Jeopardy competition.

But there is another thing that is perhaps even more impressive about a good number of these men, they take time to help out in their communities. More and more often you will hear stories about these larger than life figures doing charitable work. A defensive lineman who no longer plays for the professional team in Minnesota is still well known by military veterans in this state and beyond for his work helping injured vets. It is so uplifting to hear that these superstars are making time to do positive things like connecting with the injured and the sick. For instance, did you know that a Superbowl champion and one of the great rising stars of the NFL regularly visits the children's hospital in his city? Nearly every Tuesday, in fact, the starting quarterback for the professional football team in Seattle takes time out of his busy schedule to visit and spend time with children who are fighting cancer or other serious diseases. What a thrill that must be for those children, to spend some one-on-one time with a professional athlete, with a celebrity, with a local superstar!

Now, imagine the excitement of this man that we meet here in the book of Mark. Imagine his excitement and how it grows as his friends bring him to meet this local celebrity. Jesus is there! The man watches with great eagerness as his friends catch Jesus' attention and beg him to touch and heal this man. Imagine how his heart soars as Jesus not only comes over, but Jesus takes him aside away from the rest of the crowd! One-on-one time with Jesus! What a privilege, what an experience! And then Jesus does something that this man would never forget, for at this point Jesus shows that he is more than mere celebrity. This was more than a visit from a local superstar that would lift this poor man's spirit for a few days and help his days seem brighter for a time. No, this was a visit from the Son of God that would bring instant healing.

Even the way that Jesus healed this man was this extraordinary orchestra of personal assurance. Jesus brings this man close enough to touch him, puts his fingers onto the very spots that were causing this man so much pain and misfortune and with a compassionate sigh and a word of divine power, he heals this man completely. Jesus comes to this man in such a personal way. He takes him away from the crowd, he gathers this man to himself, and with a warm personal touch he assures him of his power and love. And let's not forget about that sigh. Jesus knew, he saw, he felt what this man was going through, and with incredible empathy and compassion, he sighs. Jesus knows the weight and the burden of sin's curse and so in his compassion Jesus sighs and then he speaks words of healing that only he could deliver.

Jesus comes to you with such a personal touch as well. Even in the midst of all these people on a Sunday morning there is this very personal side to worship. You come before him with your problems, your pains, your heartache, and you lay it before him. And he knows exactly what you are going through in this moment. He hears your prayers. As you groan, he groans; and then he speaks to you. And because of his gift of faith you are able to hear and believe. The words of absolution hit your heart personally. *Your sins are forgiven.* The words of that one hymn strike that chord with you. *He helps his children in distress.* And every once in a while it seems like the pastor knew exactly what you are going through and he is talking specifically to you. There is this personal touch, this very personal way that they Savior comes to us even during public worship. A glance over at the font also reminds you of your Savior's personal touch. As you look up at the altar you recall how the body and the blood, the bread and the wine are put so personally into your hand, and then your mouth. The wine touches your lips, your tongue and the words "*for you*" are in that moment so very singular, "*given for you, for the forgiveness of your sin.*" There is no mistaking that Jesus comes to you with this personal touch. Even here in this public place, he pulls you aside from the crowd and he gives you the time and personal attention that none of us deserve, but he desires for you. What a privilege to be in his presence, and to hear his word, to be assured of his love through Word and Sacrament!

Jesus came to this man in such a personal way, and then he *heals* him. Suddenly the man is able to hear, suddenly he is able to speak plainly. And this is where some people may want to close their ears. This is where sometimes we want to do the same. Jesus

healed this man. He restored his hearing. He made this mute man speak. Why won't he heal my problem? Maybe he won't, because he can't. That's the sinful conclusion we draw in our frustration. Suddenly this portion of the book of Mark becomes a story that does nothing more than create the illusion of hope for ailing people. There is a critical part of us that jumps to the seemingly logical yet definitely sinful conclusion that this is just a fairy tale so that we don't give up when things are bad, when sickness strikes, but Jesus can't really heal anyone, because he hasn't healed me. Maybe you or someone you know has felt this way, too.

We understand where this comes from, but by God's grace and his gift of faith we know and believe this feeling to be misguided and untrue. This account of Jesus' healing the deaf and mute man is not just a fairy tale to give us childish hope in some relief and healing that will unfortunately never come. But by faith we trust in a Savior, who has real compassion for his children. This account from Mark is hard evidence and real assurance that we have a Savior who earnestly listens as his people present him with their prayers. This is biblical proof that we have a Savior, who is more than mere legend or celebrity, but he is truly the Son of God who can heal and restore. And so we earnestly pray in our time of need knowing that he cares and is able to help us. He may heal us. He may take away our pain. But we also pray knowing what his ultimate purpose and goal for us is. His goal is for the eternal. That we would be healed spiritually and saved for all eternity.

When Jesus healed this man what did he say to this group of friends? Don't tell anyone! That always sounds a bit strange to us. We hear this several times in the New Testament. Jesus heals someone, it is this remarkable miracle, this amazing thing, how could this man not share this exciting encounter and yet Jesus tells this man and his friends, "Don't tell anyone!" Why, not? Why would he make such a request?

As we think this over, it is extremely important to again ask ourselves, "what was Jesus' purpose on earth?" He came to live and die to pay for the sins of the world. He came to preach and to teach so that people would put their trust in him as the Savior of the world and have eternal life in his name. This was his goal. Yes, He had such a remarkable compassion for people that he often healed many sick people. He brought comfort and healing to many who were hurting. And those miracles served in connecting people to his message. But his main goal, his ultimate and eternal goal, was to teach and preach, to live and die, so that all those who would believe in him would be saved for all eternity.

In his great compassion Jesus heals this man and then he tells him not to tell anyone, but they do anyway. The man and his friends are excited, they go and share the news, which would bring more crowds to Jesus and it would make his work of preaching and teaching much harder. Jesus heals this man, and his ears are now working but still he and his friends fail to listen to Jesus' instructions. They failed to recognize what the goal, what the true purpose of the Savior was. We can easily fall into similar misconceptions and similar state of mind. When we hurt we often fail to recognize that this might be for our eternal good. We want the pain to go away and we come to Jesus.

Sometimes in his mercy and compassion that pain is relieved. But sometimes it is not. God's Word and the Spirit working through that word gives us the confidence to trust in Jesus that he knows what is best for me and for those around me. This may be difficult to accept at times, but the Holy Spirit gives us the faith to say, ***He has done all things well.***

As poorly as these excited individuals listened to the Savior, remember how astutely those around Jesus and these crowds praised him. ***He has done all things well!*** They so accurately proclaimed. That is to be our proclamation of him as well and by the Spirit working through the Word and Sacrament that becomes our testimony about him more and more. May we praise him when the illness is healed or when the suffering is lifted. May we also praise him when the ailment remains and the suffering continues, as it is either for my good or for the good of others. May we in faith always proclaim, "He has done all things well" because we know that our compassionate and powerful Savior's mind can see both the temporal *and* the eternal. He came not just to tend to our physical needs, but more importantly tend to our spiritual needs.

Remember that when the apostle Paul prayed for the LORD to take that thorn in his flesh away, the LORD empathized and felt for Paul in his pain, but in the end it was the LORD's good will that Paul would continue to suffer through this ailment so that God's grace could be seen as all-sufficient to get him through. The same Jesus who in his compassion was with this deaf and mute man was with Paul. The risen and ascended Jesus attended to Paul and cared for him and heard his prayer, but did not take away this source of so much pain and trouble. And yet we can say, ***Our LORD does all things well,*** because through his experience Paul was able to encourage and provide strength for many who heard and read about his suffering.

Yes, the LORD Jesus does all things well. The Lord gives us the faith to make this proclamation. He has opened and touched our ears to his word. He has touched our hearts to believe that he has our best interests in mind, because into our ears he has spoken his holy Word. Through this holy word we are told of a remarkable Savior who despite his status, which is far beyond celebrity, still makes time for us. In fact, he lived for us. He died for us. He now he cares for us. He heals us spiritually. He forgives our sins. He gives us heaven, and hears our prayers and cares for our physical needs. We are in his wise and powerful and generous care. And through Word and Sacrament he comes to us in such a personal way to tend to us in good times and bad! One-on-one time with the Savior refreshes us so that we may take on the pains, the struggles, and the challenges of each new day! What an uplifting experience! What a joy to know that our LORD cares. He will guide us through the pain and problems of this world. In his love he will take away pain and illness, in his wisdom he will allow some difficulties to stay for a time, but ultimately we have so much comfort in knowing that one day he will take us to that place where there will be absolutely no more illness, sickness, or disease, and instead we will enjoy victory, and his rich blessings of peace and joy, for all eternity. Yes, no matter what comes our way, sickness or health, joy or pain, our LORD Jesus is with us and so in faith we may always proclaim, "He does all things well. " Amen.