

“He Makes the Deaf to Hear”

I can't imagine being deaf, can you? No music, no sounds of nature, no Husker fight songs, no hymns! Never hearing the voice of the Good Shepherd. Never hearing Jesus say those three most loving words “I forgive you.” Just empty silence.

Church would be altogether different if you were deaf. Thanks be to God for those who reveal God's love in Christ through sign language – but the Church is primarily a place for ears that hear. The Scriptures tell us over and over again – “he who has ears to hear, let him hear” – and, “faith comes by hearing.”

The bottom line is that with deafness comes isolation and frustration. Some of you have probably experienced this as your loss of hearing frustrates your attempts to communicate with your family. Not being able to hear limits your ability to communicate – creates an uneasy need and dependence on others – and cuts you off from people.

The man in today's Gospel lesson knew this all too well. He couldn't hear the Scriptures read in the synagogue – and other than a few friends, he was cut off. Sin's curse and it's destruction in the world was obvious to him, and personal – his deafness a daily reminder of the chains that bound him.

Even though we do not know this man, we pity him – but what we don't realize is that this is a self-pity, because we are no different – we are all deaf before God. 1 Corinthians 2 says that, “The natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them.”

In other words, according to our fallen, sinful nature, we are deaf to God's Word. We are tuned out. We prefer to listen to other more entertaining voices – or listen to the voice of our own wisdom. We are like Israel who has come before us – we are “stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears!”

We don't want to hear those words that condemn our sins and show us that we ARE sin. We don't want to hear that all our good works are but rubbish before God. We don't want to hear that we are dependent, and cannot save ourselves. Like little children we stick our fingers in our ears and listen to the sound of our own voices.

The tongue is dependent upon the ears. If our hearing is missing, or distorted – then our speech is impeded as well. A mouth created for prayer, praise and thanksgiving – falls silent – or, when opened, only speaks garbled, misleading, or harmful words.

This is the condition of the deaf man. This is our condition – for we are by nature sinful ... and deaf.

The Lord has not created you to live in isolation – so He comes to you, in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ – that He might touch you, and restore His creation.

Did you notice how the friends of this deaf man BEGGED Jesus to lay His hand on him? Jesus is God in the flesh. He is not a distant God, not a sterile God who puts a layer of latex between Himself and the patient. No, He's a hand-on sort of Physician – One who touches our illnesses – sharing our own flesh and blood in order to make our problems His own.

Jesus takes this deaf man aside – not for privacy – but so that this man might know that Jesus is dealing with him specifically. The miracles are not a show for Jesus, so that He might gain popularity – they are manifestations that Jesus is here “for you.”

The Lord who created the heavens and the earth and everything in them – comes to deaf and mute sinners – to deal with them personally. He comes to release YOU from that which binds you.

Jesus takes you aside and lays His hand of blessing on you in Holy Baptism. He takes you aside to hear your confession, and to declare that His forgiveness is “for you.” With His own Body and Blood He touches you in the Holy Supper – a healing touch that gives new life. Yes, Jesus deals with you, even as He deals with this deaf man.

Jesus sticks His fingers into the deaf man's ears – and with the Word of His mouth – bestows the life-giving Spirit on this man. That which was once dead, and bound by sin – is now made alive by the Holy Spirit – resurrected to new life so that his ears might hear the joyous news of the salvation which is his in Christ Jesus.

And so that this man, whose tongue is bound, might also join with the angels and archangels and all the company of heaven in singing the praises of God – Jesus spits and touches the man’s tongue. Jesus gives from His own mouth to the mouth of the mute – so that his speech may be recreated.

“Be opened,” Jesus says, “and it was so.” This divine water and Word looses the man’s tongue, for the impediment of sin has been removed. His mouth is opened and “he spoke plainly” [lit. “in an orthodox way”] – declaring the praises of God who had given him new life.

It is not just ears and mouth, but our entire being is under the shroud of death which our sin has earned. It is not a specific therapy, a new technology, or a strong will, that can set us free. It is SIN that binds us – so it is SIN that must be dealt with – and the Lord has told us plainly, that, “without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sin.”

Jesus, God’s own Son, took on the sin of all people when He took on our flesh and blood – He took on this man’s sin, and yours. Through temptation and trial, He remains true. In obedience to the Father’s will, He drinks the cup of God’s wrath at sin. He’s nailed to the accursed tree – His blood is shed to atone – and His life is given into death, to pay the wages for all sin.

“It is finished,” He says and then the Word of God is silenced in death a death because of you, and “for you.” On the third day His mouth is opened so that you may be comforted by His death and resurrection. He speaks plainly, orthodoxly. I have come – not to be against you – but “for you.” “Peace be with you.”

The resurrected Christ comes to stand in the midst of us this day – that we may know that sin and death has no mastery over Him. His victory is shown forth in the healing of the deaf-mute – and in your hearing this day – as you receive the things of the Holy Spirit. The Lord has opened your ears and your lips – that you may hear and believe – and forever sing His praise. Amen.

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