

Sermon for Sunday September 5, 2021

Mark 7: 24-37

When I was in kindergarten, my teacher sent a note home to my mother. She was concerned because at times I was not behaving; not really acting out, but not following directions. When others were called to the circle for story time, I would still be drawing or doing whatever task we had been working on just before. But other times, I would be the first to clean up and join the circle. Ms. Ricadella noticed that if my back was to her, I would not obey, but if I could see her face, I was one of the first to comply.

The note said that it appeared I was hard of hearing, and would my mother agree to have my hearing tested by the school nurse? It was discovered that my many bouts of ear infections had made me almost deaf. At a young age I had taught myself to lip read, and so could follow most directions when facing the speaker. A tonsillectomy and massive doses of antibiotics restored most of my hearing, but I still have some loss, mostly in my right ear. Thanks to my teacher and good doctors, my hearing and my speech were preserved!

In today's Gospel, Jesus restores not only a man's hearing but his ability to speak. Most people who are born deaf cannot speak because they have never heard speech and cannot copy the sounds that make up words. After age 4 or so, the ability to actually learn to speak is diminished and most of that part of the brain is shut off. (Use it or lose it?) Because of this, a baby's hearing is tested so any loss may be treated before it is too late.

Now the man in our story is no longer handicapped. He can communicate and hear others communicating with him. He can participate in worship, because he is healed and whole. The songs of birds, the laughter of children, the music of a celebration, and the sharing of news is now all his to enjoy. From a silent world to one rich in sound.

As I continued to read the Gospel and think about it, I realized that the writer has Jesus saying, "be opened", not be healed. An "AHA" moment.

Can you recall a time when you had to ask a person to repeat themselves? It wasn't because you are unable to hear, the words made sense, but the message did not quite make it to your brain. You may have been focused on something else, not the speaker. Or you heard only part of what was said, planning your reply.

Have you noticed how noisy our world has become? It is easy to be distracted or not to physically be able to hear someone over the sounds of everyday life. The television or music. Traffic and sirens. The person in the next cubicle. Or my husband's favorite, the sound of gas-powered lawn service equipment. Most of us have learned to 'tune out' these extra sounds, but at the cost of being able to do that at any time, not just when they are a distraction but even when it is important to hear.

Does anyone recall the comedy skit where the wife wants to show that her husband is not listening to her? She starts by saying "Do you want to know my plans for the day dear?" "Sure honey". "I think I will go rob the bank this morning" "Sounds interesting dear" "Then I think I will knock over a few gas stations" "Okay" "then I think I will run off with the Fuller Brush man". "Have fun dear".

"Be opened". Listen. Hear. Actively listen by being in the moment, and open to the communication, the message. Sometimes it is hard to focus and hear what is being said, especially if the concept is hard or foreign. Pastor Mark's sermons last month about Jesus being the Bread of Life, and his followers needing to eat Jesus' flesh and drink Jesus' blood was very difficult for them to hear. The good news of salvation and eternal life was much easier. Giving up all you have to follow Him is very hard to hear. That you are unconditionally loved is not difficult at all.

In the early days of the church, most people were not literate and learned everything by hearing. Most of the gospels were written later in the first century. The safest way to teach at first was by word of mouth; then the Romans had no proof of the concept of the meetings. Then those early Christians could go out and share the good news by speaking to a few at a time who would then share the message to a few more.

While we are able to read the Bible, we still come together to hear the

Word. Jesus has said "be opened", meaning not only our ears, but also our minds and our hearts. If we do that, we will also be able to speak plainly and share the joy of the good news.