

## “Just A Single Word!” Mark 7:30-37 Trinity 12 2021

In preparing for this sermon, I sat down early last week with my Greek Bible and began to dissect the Gospel lesson, letting the text direct me as words or phrases or concepts entered into my mind. Why did Jesus touch the ears and the tongue of the deaf mute? Why did He do this in private, and not where everyone else could see? Why did He spit on His fingers? What significance, if any, does the spittle of Christ play in this account and in our lives? Why did Jesus tell the crowds to stop singing His praises after the miracle occurred? The crowd proclaims, “He does all things well!” What’s so wrong with that? What’s the difference between doing something well and doing something good? Is there a difference? Why did Jesus sigh before speaking that performative Word of healing?

And then an interesting point popped up as I pondered the crowd and their role in this account. You see, the crowd generally gets a bad rap in this account. They’re proclaiming that Jesus “does all things well,” but, strangely, Jesus insists on “shushing” them. The irony is unavoidable. You can’t help but talk about it. The guy who couldn’t talk and couldn’t hear is given the ability by Christ Himself to hear and to speak, while the people who already had the ability to hear and speak are now being told to not speak, a command that they fail to heed. The more Jesus urged silence, the more they ran their mouths. And that leads us back to the question as to why Jesus would try to silence such praise. But...such a question misses a very important point that is so often overlooked: The crowd did have faith in Jesus. They did bring the deaf mute to Christ, fully expecting Him to heal. This is certainly commendable.

As interesting as this is to note, what I find even more interesting is the fact that this was commonly understood and taken for granted for much of the New Testament Church’s existence. Looking back over centuries’ worth of sermons and writings, it was very apparent that the

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pastors just assumed that everyone already knew that the crowd was faithful. They weren't perfect in their faith. They didn't understand everything there was to know about Jesus and His mission and ministry, but they were faithful. They came to Him. They brought others to Him.

And this is where our study of the word Εφφαθα (ephphatha)—the Word Christ spoke as He commanded the ears to be opened and the tongue to be loosed—came to the forefront. You see, this particular Gospel lesson was used by the early Church for centuries as an integral part of the baptismal liturgy. The reason the ephphatha text was read aloud for all to hear was because all needed to hear it and be reminded of the gift of life that Christ had given to each and every one of them. Everyone needed to be reminded of the life-giving power and efficacy of the Word of God. The Word of God works! It does what it says! It's performative. “Let there be...” and there was! “Little girl, I say to you ‘arise,’” and she did. “Lazarus, come out of the tomb,” and he did. “Ephphatha! Be opened!” And the ears and the tongue instantly obeyed their Creator and Redeemer.

Along these same lines and in keeping with our early Church grandparents of the faith, this very proper ephphatha text that sounds in our ears today speaks to the faith of the crowd bringing the one who is in bondage to Christ. The Word we hear fills our hearts and pours forth from our lips. This life-giving Word naturally bears good fruit; the fruits of faith witnessed in our thanks and praise and our pointing others to and bringing others to Christ. We get it. Maybe not perfectly, but we get it. Here is Christ! Ephphatha! The Word works! It's so simple, and yet so unbelievably profound, the heights and depths of which we'll never come close to understanding. The Word still works. I know we already know this, but how often do our words and deeds betray the fact that maybe we don't believe it? I won't waste the time enumerating the many ways our unbelief in the efficacy of the Word is

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put on full display in our daily lives. I will, however, point out the fact that so often we do disbelieve the power and efficacy of God’s Word simply because we don’t see the results we’re looking for or hoping for. We disbelieve and doubt because we don’t see immediate and tangible change in our immediate and tangible lives. So often we disbelieve because we’re convinced that there has to be something bigger, better, flashier; something that generates more of the change we’re hoping for, more hype and happiness and gushing emotions. “This...? This is just Word and Sacrament ministry. There’s got to be more! There needs to be more! How else are we going to get through to people and make disciples and grow the Church?”

Folks: That’s not yours to worry about. God is the One who opens the ears and hearts and minds of people. God is the One who gets through to people and grants life and growth out of sinful nothingness. God is the One who frees and loosens the bonds of sin. God is the One who works and sustains faith in people. As I’ve said in the past, the Church already has a Savior. It doesn’t need you. It doesn’t need me. As Christ Himself once said, “If these ones didn’t cry out, the very stones in the street would cry out.” God doesn’t need me to make salvation work or to make Christ known. I could be replaced by a rock. But...God chooses to use me to work His gift of salvation. It’s very humbling and more than a little terrifying.

He does the same thing with you in your daily vocations. As the LWML says, “Our hands to work for Him, our feet to go on His errands, our voice to sing His praises, our lips to proclaim His redeeming love, our silver and our gold to extend His Kingdom, our will to do His will....” We are all called by Him to point to Him and bring others to Him and proclaim Him and His Truth; the Truth that says that the wage of sin is death and all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God; the Truth that says that the wage of sin has been paid in full by the sacrifice of

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Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God who takes away all the sin of the world. We’re all called by Him to simply let the light and joy of our justification in Him shine forth for all to behold, like a city upon a mountaintop or candle in a dark room.

“τετελεσται (Tetelestai)! It is finished!” This is the single word that Christ victoriously proclaimed from His cross right before surrendering His Spirit and falling peacefully asleep in the sabbath rest of death in the hands of His loving Father. It is finished, once and for all! Christ’s performative Word of victory still booms from Golgotha in our ears and in our presence today. We behold this one-word victory over sin, death, and the devil in very real and tangible ways. “Take and eat. Take and drink. This is My body and My blood, given and shed for you for the forgiveness of all your sin. This Baptism now saves you. In My stead and by My command and authority I do declare you forgiven. Fear not! Be at peace.” These performative words are for you! God speaks them, and they do what He says; they bring and confer a peace that surpasses all understanding; a peace that only God Himself can give; a peace that God Himself does give to you, to me, and to all who faithfully come and receive His free gifts of grace, mercy, and peace. AMEN.