

Mark 7:31-37

Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost

September 12, 2021

If you have ever met someone famous, you were likely excited. Gushing fans have sometimes not wanted to wash their hands after shaking them with their heartthrob. You cherish the moment; it leaves a lasting impression. Sometimes, however, the experience leaves us disappointed. The person may have seemed aloof, showing only a superficial interest at best. They came across as rude and self-centered.

Encounters with Jesus are memorable. He is transforming and powerful. The man in today's Gospel certainly realized that as well as many who observed the outcome. We also learn from it today. With the crowd we exclaim

HE DOES ALL THINGS WELL

- I. Jesus deals with us compassionately
- II. Jesus meets our needs
- III. Jesus deserves our praise

Compassion sums up the entire encounter of our Lord Jesus in this text. He had been up north, outside Palestine, in the territory of what is Lebanon today. He was staying away from the opposition and the crowds who misunderstood his purpose. He was on what many surmise to be the longest journey he ever traveled. He likely used the time for instruction of the Twelve.

He now came to an area called the Decapolis. That's a Greek name which means "ten cities" so was likely primarily Gentile territory. It was in the northeast part of the Holy Land and east of the Jordan River. He had been there before. It was where he had cast out a host of demons from a man into a herd of pigs. The cured man had apparently spread the word as Jesus had told him to do, so people there knew of him and now brought to him a man with a need.

Our hearts certainly go out to the person. He was deaf. He could not hear singing and music, chirping birds, the words of a beloved whispered in his ear, nor warnings of danger. He also "could hardly talk." He had a speech impediment so could make sounds but not engage in a regular conversation.

We marvel at the knowledgeable way the Savior dealt with him. The man's friends had asked Jesus to lay his hands on him. They were confident that would be a blessing as it had been for many others. Jesus did more. "After he took him aside, away from the crowd, Jesus put his fingers in the man's ears. Then he spit and

touched the man's tongue." Apart from the confusion of the bystanders he could address the man's needs personally. It probably also calmed him from the confusion of the crowd. Putting fingers in his ears indicated the organs he would address. Use of his mouth and the touch of the man's tongue did the same. He then looked to heaven to communicate the source of the coming action.

Then Jesus sighed. Did that denote prayer, which has been called the sighing of the Holy Spirit? Or did it express sympathy and sadness at what difficulties the presence of sin in the world causes? Bible students differ on the meaning; Mark did not explain so we leave it at that.

I know some people conclude (and Satan wants us to) that the troubles in life are a punishment for sin, so lengthy or intense suffering shows God doesn't love us and never could because our guilt is so great. While troubles do remind us of what sin brought into existence, that's not the case. We are all sinners whether we have many or few troubles. Jesus' personal actions of concern show love and compassion for the man brought to him.

So it continues. Jesus, who lived among the hurts and pains of this world, cares about us personally. He knows our needs and how to deal with them. Whatever he allows or does always aims at a positive end, especially for our souls. Look to him, pray, and trust that he will deal compassionately with his personal care. He does all things well!

## II.

He does more than feel for us. He acts. Jesus meets our needs. There is his physical care, evident in the miracle he performed. He spoke one word: "Ephphatha!" That's Aramaic, the cousin language to Hebrew used by the Jews at Jesus' time. Mark translated it for the benefit of his Greek-speaking readers: "Be opened!" The results were immediate. "At this, the man's ears were opened, his tongue was loosened and he began to speak plainly." He experienced complete recovery. What joy must have filled his heart! He could hear and he could share what was inside his mind. No speech therapy was needed nor any language lessons.

We recognize a general truth from this incident. Jesus meets all our physical needs. He does not just give us our abilities but also grants effective use of them. More common than using a miracle are what we call natural means to provide for us. We use the capabilities he has given us to work and the resources of the earth to produce the needed food and products for this life. Although restricted by sin's effects and human misuse, our world still supplies bounty in God's good and loving

care. Day after day we experience the results. A momentary miracle, no, but an abounding blessing, to be sure. He meets our daily needs and more.

Jesus also meets our needs spiritually. His miracles were termed "signs" in Scripture. They pointed to something more than the earthly problems they solved. They revealed his person as divine. He is true God who came to our world in human flesh. His purpose in coming was to supply the needs of our souls.

We were in tough shape—we were lost in sin. Not just hampered by it but spiritually dead. Daily we commit more sins. It was our very condition from birth. We were separated from God and unable to change the situation. We could only pile up more sins as we lived in selfishness and disobedience. We committed all sorts of evil and failed to do the good things God wants. We could only anticipate an eternity in hell.

Jesus came to solve our situation. He wasn't required to do so. It was an act of his grace. He lived for us; he died for us. His death removed our record of sins, huge though it was. He did that for each and every individual. He did it for the world. We have the joy of the burden lifted from our backs. His work does not just ease the difficulty of the days we walk this planet. He won for us heaven. We will spend eternity in total freedom from the effects and even from the possibility of sinning. Truly he does all things well!

### III.

Only one reaction to good news like that is possible. Jesus deserves our praise. However, he told those who witnessed the effect of his miracle not to tell others. We may wonder why he would make such a request. He didn't want to be drawn into a healing ministry. It was like his refusal to be a bread king as many wanted to make him after his feeding of the five thousand which we heard about for several weeks of the summer. He did plenty of miracles but relieving earthly woes was not his main purpose. The clock was ticking (ok, clocks and watches weren't invented yet—the shadow was advancing on the sundial or the sands through the hourglass, if they had one). The end of his earthly ministry and time of his death were approaching. Much more needed to be done to train his disciples and to teach people about the kingdom of God. He didn't need distractions or detours from his redeeming work.

His instructions didn't and couldn't stop them. "The more he did so, the more they kept talking about it." It was too great to keep a lid on. "People were overwhelmed with amazement." They saw the event and others like it as fulfillment of the Isaiah prophecy we heard in the First Lesson today. It was the

time of the Messiah whom their nation had awaited for centuries. How could they not speak out?

Were they sinning by spreading the news? Let the scholars debate that question. Let us recognize that we have no such restrictions. Rather, Jesus tells us to share the good news with all the earth.

He loosens our tongues by his physical and spiritual goodness. Knowing what he has provided and what he has in store for us, we can't keep our joy inside any more than those residents of the Decapolis. It bubbles out in words of praise as we worship him. That's what brings us here. But praise does not just happen inside these walls. It continues as we go out and interact with the world, which remains in need of Jesus. We tell others of the goodness of the Lord and we live in ways that obey and honor him. The Savior will use that witness to open more ears to the gospel message, another miracle. The Holy Spirit leads them to believe in Jesus as their Savior.

We have met Jesus in his Word. He is the most important one you will ever encounter. You have experienced his impact on your life. He does all things well. Acknowledge it, believe in him and tell the world.