

Proper 18B (Pentecost 15), 2012

Text: Mark 7:31-37

Title: Ephphatha

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Ephphatha. Be opened. Thus spoke Jesus to the deaf-mute, and thus speaks Jesus to you. Be opened. Be opened in more ways than one.

Sin makes you closed. Sin is being focused in yourself and closing yourself off from God. Sin is saying, "I matter most." Sin is saying, "I am the ultimate judge. I decide what's right and wrong. I am the source of truth." Sin only cares about my understanding. The way that I see the world around me is the only right way to see it.

Sin is like being deaf. You don't listen to God, you only listen to your heart and what you think is right. Even if you do listen to God, you judge what God says based on what you think.

Sin is like being mute. You don't speak to God. You don't ask Him for help or aid. You don't pray. You don't praise. You don't say thank you for what you've received. You are completely closed off from God.

Now Christians are often accused of being closed-minded. But that is exactly opposite of the truth. Those who are truly closed-minded are those people who close their mind to God and His Word, and rely only on themselves.

Jesus opens you up to the possibility that the world is bigger than what you can see and experience and understand for yourself. There's more out there than your tiny mind can begin to comprehend.

People with a modern worldview say, "Unless I can understand it, unless I can observe it and maybe even recreate it in an experiment, it can't be true." They close their mind to the possibility that a God could exist who is beyond their ability to understand, that there is a spiritual side to life that you can't see or touch or experience with your senses.

We can't know this on our own, we are born deaf and mute to the ways of God, and so Jesus opens us up to the spiritual side of life.

Last week we heard about all the spiritual dangers and enemies out there. Today we are reminded how the Lord opens our ears and our mouths to hear Him and to speak to Him.

Back in Luther's day, this little story was reenacted at every baptism. The pastor would actually take a little spit and touch the tongue of the person he was baptizing. Then he would actually stick his fingers in the ears of the person being baptized and say, "Ephphatha, be opened."

In baptism, your ears were opened to hear God's Word. To hear both God's law and His gospel.

When God speaks His law to you, you hear what God expects of you, you hear words like those from James about showing partiality, especially regarding the rich and the poor. Do you treat people differently based on how they dress and what they look like? Do you act nicer to people who are wealthy and may be able to do more for you? The law accuses you of not being loving towards all people.

Now if your ears are open, you will repent. You will say, “Yes Lord, I am guilty. I don’t always treat the poor as well as I should. I don’t love as I should.”

If your ears are closed, you will say, “That’s not me. I have nothing to confess. Jesus must be talking about someone else. You tell ‘em Jesus. You straighten those other sinners out.”

If Jesus opens your ears, you will be open to hearing not only God’s law, but the gospel, too, the good news, like Isaiah’s words to you today. “Be strong, fear not! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God. He will come and save you.”

If your ears are open, you will say, “Yes, come and save me. Heal me and make me new again. Turn the desert of this world into your paradise. I can’t wait for you to come again.”

If your ears are closed, you will say, “No thanks, I’m doing fine. I can take care of myself. I don’t need saving. Maybe someone else needs a Savior, maybe someone else could use a Jesus, but not me.”

As Jesus opens your ears, He opens you to hearing Him, to knowing Him, and to going beyond yourself, outside of yourself, to receiving His word.

Jesus not only opens your ears, but your tongue as well. Notice that the ears come first. First you listen, then you speak. Just like a child learning to talk. First you listen, then you speak.

There’s a verse from Psalm 51 used at the opening of morning and evening prayer: “O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise.”

If Jesus doesn’t open our lips, all we can talk about is ourselves. All we can do is praise ourselves, and puff ourselves up.

But if Jesus opens your lips, all you can do is talk about Him. All you want to do is sing His praises and thank Him for what He’s done for you. Those are the words that Jesus puts in your mouth and on your lips and on your tongue.

The folks in the Gospel couldn’t stop talking about Jesus. In fact they were talking too much, even when Jesus wanted them to be quiet. They just couldn’t hold it in. They just had to tell everyone how wonderful Jesus’ works were. “He does all things well.” There’s nothing this guy can’t do.

That's not usually our problem. Our problem is not that we can't stop talking about Jesus. Our problem is that we're too shy and afraid to talk about Jesus. We are more worried about ourselves and what others will think about us. We are worried about saying the wrong things. We don't want to look or to sound foolish. Our tendency is to keep closing in on ourselves and our needs.

This is our tendency as a congregation, too. We are constantly tempted to be closed in on ourselves and our needs, and I'm guilty of that as much as any of you. We are often more concerned about keeping the doors open so that we keep our church going, rather than opening up, listening to Jesus, and then talking about Him to people around us.

We're happy when visitors happen to make their way in, but we're not always good about using all the opportunities that Jesus gives us to open our mouths and talk about Him.

This fall is full of opportunities to talk about Jesus. Next week is our picnic. Invite someone to come along, and say something about Jesus, too.

Evenings with Jesus is coming up in a week and a half. Find a young person you know who doesn't know about Jesus. Invite them to come and hear more about Him.

Next week is also our congregational meeting. Consider this an opportunity to chat about how we as a congregation can avoid being closed in on ourselves and be open to speaking more about Jesus.

The answer is not to just try harder, but to listen more, to be filled with Jesus so that we can't help but talk about Him. Last week we started our new study on the book of Acts. In this book we read about how Jesus uses ordinary people, even people who were once His enemies, and sends them to speak His word in new and exciting ways. Come downstairs this morning, and begin this journey that will take the disciples from Jerusalem throughout all Judea and Samaria, and even to the ends of the earth.

It all starts with Jesus' touch and Jesus' words. It starts with listening to Him as He opens your ears, and then lets your tongue loose to do some good.