

Sermon for the 12th Sunday after Trinity, August 30, 2020

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Here we have the story of Jesus, up in the sea of Galilee area, near The Decapolis, and they bring to him a man with a speech impediment and was deaf. So he couldn't speak. And he couldn't hear.

And instead of just saying "Be healed", like He often did, or just lay His hands upon the man, He actually gets pretty intimate and physical. He sticks His fingers in the ears. And then He licks His fingers and touches His tongue, or spitting, He touches His tongue. Spits on His hands and touches the tongue of the man. And then he says "Ephphatha," which means be opened. And suddenly his mouth is open and his ears are open. He can speak and he can hear.

Now the weird thing is He charges them to tell no one. He does this often after He's done miracles. He says, "Now don't tell anybody what has happened." Or, "Go show yourself to the priest, but don't tell anybody how this all took place." And yet nobody seems to listen to Him when He says that. They keep on praising Him, because what else can you do when you see a miracle of God?

Well, there's a lot of things, unfortunately, that we can do. We can attribute it to some other source. We can attribute it to the good of the man, that he deserved this, we can attribute it to many things. But sometimes we need to remember that we are called by God to sometimes pay attention to refraining from speaking. Now, in this instance, when Jesus is telling them not to speak out, it's not that He doesn't want them to praise God. That is always a good thing, to praise God. But sometimes your words are going to be misconstrued. And sometimes they're going to create a response that you had never intended it to.

So we need to be wise as serpents and as innocent as doves to know when there is a time to speak and a time to refrain from speaking. And in this case, the reason I think that Jesus wanted them to refrain from speaking is He did not want the people of Israel or Samaria or any place else for that matter to praise Him and to look at following Him because He does miracles. Because they're focusing upon the dross and the straw rather than the great, the meat of the substance, and the glory and the treasure that is there.

See, if everybody's just following after you because you're going to give them food like He did in feeding the 5,000 or because you're going to heal the sick and cast out demons, all those things are good that Jesus does, but they're not the reason why you should follow Jesus. Because sometimes you're not going to get the healing. Sometimes, in fact, all of us, even every single individual that was healed by Jesus, even the people that were raised from the dead, they all had to face death again at some point. The healing that Jesus gave was temporary. The physical was only a temporary healing. And what was more important, to Jesus, to the disciples, and to everyone who knew and understood the Word of God, it wasn't the physical miracles that were the point.

The physical miracles were to point to the fact that Jesus had the authority to say, "Your sins are forgiven." That was the point. Because it's the sins that are forgiven that gives us the hope of eternal life, not the miracles that take place, and not our own actions and goodness. We do not deserve the grace of God. We need to understand that. And that's what the 2 Corinthians passage is talking about. It's saying

that we are not sufficient in ourselves to claim anything, but we are made sufficient to be ministers through a new covenant. Not the letter, but the Spirit.

Now he says in here, "Now the ministry of death carved in letters on stone." Now there's nothing ambiguous about that. That is very clearly Moses and the Ten Commandments that he received on the stone tablets. In fact, he goes on later to say that very obviously this ministry, this Law, this ministry of death was so glorious that people could not even look upon the face of Moses when he came down from the hill, having received the Law of God, having been in the presence of God. Now he's saying this Law that God gave to mankind was good. And it is marvelous. And it is glorious. The Ten Commandments are a glorious exposition on how to live in a way that is pleasing to God. The problem is we fail to do it. And so what the Law does then instead of giving us a great opportunity to serve and praise God, we take it and we abuse it, and it ends up being a condemnation of death and judgment to us, because all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Not one of us has followed the law perfectly.

And so the Law leads to condemnation. The first use of the Law is to condemn us and to tell us that we have failed against God and deserve the judgment of God. Now, Paul is saying that this was so glorious, the ministry of death was so glorious, the people could not look upon Moses. How much more glorious is the ministry of life through the Spirit, which we have life eternal in Jesus Christ, because we have received the Spirit of God in our baptisms. And were connected to Christ in His death and suffering on the cross?

And so Christ and His ministry is a ministry of Spirit and it is a ministry of life. And how much glorious is that than the Law. See we should not be looking to the Law for our do's and don'ts, we should not be thinking that Christianity is all about what I am supposed to do to please God. Christianity is all about what God has done for us and how we have the opportunity to thank and praise Him and give glory to the majesty that is Jesus Christ, who was gracious and loving, who could have come with His sovereign judgment upon us, and yet did not, or does not want to. So He gives us His gift of life freely out of His grace and mercy. That's how He wants to interact with humanity.

Only if we reject that, only if we insist upon following after the ministry of death and seeking to do the Ten Commandments for our own righteousness or seeking to justify ourselves without the Ten Commandments, only then does the judgment of God come. He does not desire it, but He will give it, if we do not understand the gift that He has been given. And so we are to follow God because He has brought an end to the ministry of death, and He has brought life and immortality to light through His Son, Jesus Christ. And for that, we thank and praise Him. And for that, we call others to thank and praise God. We don't want them to be called into the church so that they might be good people. We do want them to be good people, but that's not the point. The point is we want them to be forgiven sinners. We want them to know that they are forgiven, and that they are loved by God. And then as a result of that love and grace, that they be good people or seek to serve God in all that they say and do.

We have not yet come to the time that Isaiah was promising. He says that, "Out of the gloom and darkness, the eyes of the blind shall see, the meek shall turn fresh joy in the Lord. And the poor among mankind shall exalt in the Holy One of Israel." Now that has begun in Jesus Christ. He has made the

spiritually blind to see and the deaf to hear. And sometimes physically He has done it, as in our Gospel lesson. However, we have this next section, "For the ruthless shall come to nothing. And the scoffer cease and all who watch to do evil shall be cut off, who by a word make a man out to be an offender, and lay a snare for him who reproves in the gate. And with an empty plea, turn aside him who is in the right."

We are living in this time where it seems like evil is succeeding and people who are innocent are being judged unjustly. And there's a snare for those who are reproofing, who are saying, "This is wrong." And they're being judged and condemned as being judgmental and not loving, rather than, "This is the Word of God. And you are not doing what God has called to us do. Repent." That's our job. And so we are not in this time yet where the ruthless shall come to nothing. In fact, at this moment in history, as in pretty much every other moment in history, it seems like the ruthless are succeeding.

But again, this is Isaiah's prophecy. He prophesies as if he has seen events far off into the future, which he has, but he's seen not just the events of Jesus Christ coming, where the blind shall see and the deaf shall hear, but he's also seen the events of the end of the world, where God will come in his glory and judge all people and stop the mouths of the ruthless and the evil ones and cause all knees to bow before Him. He can't tell the difference between Jesus coming the first time and Jesus coming the second time, because he's so far removed from the events. It's like seeing a mountain, a string of mountains. Some of them are much closer than others, but from far away, they all look like they're the same.

And that's the same thing with prophecy. Some of this prophecy is about Jesus, His first coming, some of it is about Jesus and His second coming. And so we are still looking forward to the time when the ruthless shall come to nothing. But it is coming. Christ will come again, and He will judge the living and the dead. And every knee will bow, including the ruthless and the evil. Now they will do it because they realize that they have disobeyed their King and Lord, and they are waiting for judgment.

We will do it out of joy and thanksgiving because our king has come and we get the opportunity to praise Him and to worship Him. And so we will go to our knees with joy. And we then are called to declare the Words of the Lord so that other people might know that about God, that He is ready to forgive. And then they might put their trust in Him. That is a time to praise. That is a time to speak. And that is a time to give glory to God.

May He be with you always and give you the strength to know when to speak, and when to refrain, and always to give glory to God in all things for His surpassing greatness and for forgiving us our sins. May His grace and mercy and peace be and abide with you always, now and forevermore, unto life everlasting. Amen.