

## 12th Sunday after Trinity, September 4, 2022

**Readings: Isaiah 29: 17-24, 2 Corinthians 3:4-11, Mark 7: 31-37**

### ***Faith Comes from Hearing***

A man who was deaf and therefore also had an impediment in his speech was brought to Jesus (Mark 7:31–37). In the same way, all are by nature deaf toward God and therefore also unable to confess the faith rightly. For *“faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ”* (Rom. 10:9–17). Jesus put His fingers into the man’s ears, and He spat and touched His tongue. Even so in Holy Baptism, water sanctified by the words of Jesus’ mouth is applied to us; and the finger of God, that is, the life-giving Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 3:4–11) is put into our ears in the hearing of the baptismal Gospel. Jesus’ sighing *“Ephphatha”* opened the man’s ears, and his tongue was loosed to speak plainly as Isaiah prophesied of the Messiah, *“In that day the deaf shall hear the words of a book”* (Is. 29:18–24) So also, He who sighed and breathed His last on the cross for us has given us to hear and believe in Him and has opened our lips that our mouths may declare His praise.

### **Sermon Transcript:**

Today, we'll see how the Epistle reading is connected with the Gospel, and the Old Testament in a little bit. But first off, remember, we need to think about who is writing this book. This is Paul. He wrote practically about a third of the New Testament. He is an apostle from God. He had a vision directly from God telling him what he needed to do. And this is the man who has, if anybody, lived up to the example of what you are to be as a Christian, it was Paul. And yet, what does he say about himself? He says, "Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God." He is making it very clear that in spite of the fact he had been called by God to be an apostle, it is not him that makes the difference, but it is the Holy Spirit that works within him. He claims nothing. No good works, no decision, no authority. It all comes from God. And he hammers this home, saying that he is a messenger of the new covenant. Not of the letter, but of the Spirit. "For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life." Now, that's pretty drastic. The letter kills. What is that letter that we are talking about here, then? And he talks about this a little bit in the next sentence. He says, "Now is the ministry of death..." Okay, so now the letter kills, and it's a ministry of death. This is pretty harsh right here. "For this ministry of death, carved in letters on stone." Aha! We're talking about the Ten Commandments. We're talking about the law that Moses brought down from the mountain, written by God, on stone tablets that Moses brings down. Paul is calling them the letter that kills and the ministry of death.

So, we need to clarify this, to make sure we understand what's going on here. If what Paul is saying is true, and it is. Then our faith, our Christianity is not based upon obedience to the Ten Commandments. That might sound strange at first. The Christian faith is not about being a good person and following the words of the law. The faith of Christianity is all about having trust in the One who was able to fulfill the law perfectly. Because when it comes right down to it, when we look at the Ten Commandments, especially when we understand the full breadth of what it means to have no other gods, or to not misuse His name, or to honor the sabbath day, or any of those others.

A lot of times I've found it interesting, and I've talked to people who will say, "Well, I'm a good person. I follow the Ten Commandments," when they're trying to justify themselves and their behavior, on why they don't come to church, or why they don't want to believe in Christian faith or whatever. "I'm a good person. I follow the Ten Commandments. Now by that, what they mean is, "I follow the last seven." Because the first three Commandments: "You should have no other gods; you should not misuse His name; and you should honor the sabbath day." Honoring the sabbath day means listening to His word, valuing His word. Having no other gods meaning recognize Him and Him alone. So you can be a good person and follow all those seven-ish, if you look at it narrowly and you don't look too deeply into your behavior, maybe, you could possibly think that you're

obeying the last seven of the Ten Commandments. But there's no way you're around those first three. You just can't do it. And I know that you recognize that, and you realize, "Yeah, I'm not even doing the last seven very well either."

So, we are lost. We are condemned. The wages of sin is death. So, the letters in stone do bring about death. They tell us that we are dead in our sins and trespasses. We have no sufficiency in and of ourselves. No one does. But it is all given to us as a gift from God. He gives us His Spirit, and makes us alive, by His own efforts, not by our own. So we never get any of the credit or glory, which is good because I'd have to live up to that credit and glory. And I'm not very good at it. So, if I can point to Christ and say, "He's done it. And He did it perfectly. And I'm relying on His perfection"? It takes a lot of pressure off of me. Because it's not about me, and it's not about you. It's about what God has done for us, the divine service.

That He gives to us His gifts. We don't have to earn it. We don't have to prove that we're worthy of it. We don't have to prove that we're better than a majority of the people, so that we are on the right side of things. We can freely admit, "I am a poor, miserable sinner. I've sinned against You in thought and deed. But I trust in your Spirit, in your Word to give me life." And that is what Paul is talking about. And the Ten Commandments are glory. I mean, they are the Word of God. They are very clear. We are left in no doubt of what God expects. There's no wiggle room. There's no question. "Well, maybe if I go in the middle of the winter solstice, and I pray to the soul of the sun and the moon, and I worship the trees, or I do this thing, or that thing, maybe things will work out right, but I'm not sure. So I'm going to try this. Or I'm going to try that. Or I'm going to try other things." There is a clarity in the law, which is this is what God grants.

But rather than giving us hope that we can live up to it, and we can strive harder to become like it, it kills us. But His words then brings us back to life through His promise, and His grace, and His love. He heals us. And He gives us eyes to see and ears to hear the message of the truth. That even though we are dead in our sins and trespasses, we are saved by grace through faith. And that is a gift given to us by God."

The prophet, Isaiah, is talking about the future. He's talking about what's going to happen. That God is going to show grace to His people. That at the end of His day, the deaf will hear and the blind will see. And the meek will inherit the earth. Well, that's actually what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount. But you hear that in Isaiah. You hear Jesus' words in Isaiah. You actually hear it. He healed this man who was deaf and blind. And when John the Baptist was in prison, and he was beginning to doubt. He had questions about whether Jesus was really the Messiah, whether he had done it right. He sent his disciples and said, "Are you the one? Or should we look for another?" And how did Jesus respond? "Look what has happened. The blind can see. The deaf hear. The lame walk. And the dead are raising up." He's quoting from Isaiah, and Isaiah's telling us, "This is the time of Christ where we will be made spiritually alive." We could not see. We were blind to the law. The law blinds us. But the Gospel gives us life and light. We don't hear the Word of God except through the Gospel, which gives us the hope of everlasting life.

Now, Isaiah says that, "There's going to be a time where the ruthless have come to nothing and the scoffer cease, and all who watch to do evil shall be cut off, who by the word that make a man out to be an offender." That's rather comforting. I haven't seen it yet. I mean, it still seems like the ruthless are ruling. It still seems like the scoffer is succeeding. It still seems like all who watch to do evil are succeeding, they've been able to do it. I mean, look at the world around us. It seems like that's what's happening. But we hear the Word of God, it's just, "It will not last." This is not the reality. Yes, it appears like evil is winning, but that's not the reality. God has already won. We are already citizens of His kingdom. We are already free from the guilt and condemnation. We are already free from the trials.

We go through this world, we're struggling right now. But we are members of a new kingdom. We are in the kingdom of God right now. We're waiting for His victory, the fullness of it. And that's what Isaiah's talking about. We see portions of it. We get a foretaste of it, in the body and blood of Jesus Christ. We hear His word proclaiming victory, but we will see it in its fullness when He comes again in glory. And then, absolutely, the

ruthless will come to nothing, and the scoffers cease. There is still hope in the Gospel, and in the Word of God, who comes to take away our spiritual blindness, and our deafness, so that we might hear, and believe, and trust in Him. He will sanctify us and make us holy.

You see, what Paul is talking about here in 2 Corinthians, there really are only two religions in the world. There's the religion of the law, and the religion of the Gospel. The religion of the law, it may not be clear like the Ten Commandments written out. It may be whatever practices the Muslims, and the Hindu, and the Buddhists... and you list the other religions out there in the world... "If you do X, Y, and Z, then you will attain whatever reward you're supposed to get." That's a religion of law. "You do, and then you will get." It's something that you earn by your own behavior. We, as Christians, are sometimes tempted to think that way as well. "Well, God loves me because I go to church on a regular basis." Or "I'm a good Christian because I give regularly to the church, or come to church regularly. I give to missions. I read my Bible every day." All of that is fine and good. I'm not mocking that. But that's not the reason why you're a good Christian.

The reason you're a good Christian is because Christ came to die for you, and you believe that to be true. That's it. Your faith, which is a gift given to you by God, through the power of the Holy Spirit. So you don't even get credit for that. It is all about God, and what He has done for you. How do you know that you are a good Christian? How do you know that you are saved by God? Because God chose you. "Because I am baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit." Because He has given me the Word of faith, and planted it in my heart. Because He has done it all for me. That's what makes you a good Christian, it's what God has done for you. And you realizing that it's all about Him, and not about you, or me.

So, what are we to do with this? How are we then to respond? Now, that's the key. We respond by thanking and praising Him, serving Him, and obeying Him. We respond by doing the good works. We respond by sharing the Word of God. And we respond by holding fast to His Word. See, good works are normal, everyday, mundane things. I mean, think about how Jesus healed this person. Stuck His fingers in their ears. Spit and then touched his tongue. This is everyday things. This is mundane. This is nothing spiritual, nothing holy or miraculous. It's every day. It's day to day. It's mundane. That is where we live our Christian life. That is where our good works take place, in the day-to-day grind of everyday life. Of how we respond to the frustrating individual that we have to work with on a regular basis. How we respond to our neighbor that is just touching our last nerve. How we respond to the crazy driver on 301, or 75, or wherever it might be. How we respond to our children, or to our spouse, or to anyone else.

But all of that comes after. After the Word of God is dwelling within us. After we hear the message, and after our eyes are opened and our ears are opened, to hear what God desires. See, we need to understand the Word of God. We need to be fed and nourished by the Word, so that when we do serve, we do it with the right attitude, and we do it with right purpose. But we must be filled first. So, the first good work that we do is we hear, and we read, and we learn, and we pray, and we grow. And from that organically comes the good things. The good works that we are called to do. Not because we have to, because if we don't, God's going to punish us. But we do them because He has saved us. And we are His children. And as His children, we want to thank our Father, for how wonderful He is.

So, let us focus on His grace. The glory of His salvation. Not the glory of the law, that's going to fade away. It's going to end. The law will end. When we die, or when God comes again, whichever comes first, the law is done. It's done its work. But the glory and grace of God? That is eternal. When we see our heavenly Father, we will rejoice in our salvation because we see Christ. And we will see the nails, and the spear opening on His side. We will see how He paid for our sins. And we will rejoice in the grace and mercy for all eternity. The law will end, but the grace and mercy of God is for all eternity. For you, and for me, and for all of mankind.

May His grace, and His mercy, and His peace be and abide with you always, now and forevermore, unto life everlasting. Amen.