

12th Sunday after Trinity, August 27, 2023

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

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

So we have here in the Book of Isaiah a passage that is giving hope and encouragement to the people because at this time as Isaiah is preaching and prophesying, it seems that evil is succeeding in the world, and that might sound a little bit familiar to us today. He talks about the ruthless and the ones who scoff, those who watch to do evil, those who say a word to make somebody innocent an offender, those who lay a snare for those who reprove in the gate. In other words, to insult those who are trying to call sin sin and trying to call people to repentance and those who with an empty plea turn aside those who are in the right. In other words, to deceive and use clever rhetoric to make someone guilty who is actually innocent. In other words, people who are seeking to make the truth a lie and the lie a truth, which sounds a lot like our society today.

We have a lot of people who are trying to convince us that there are, who knows, 23 different genders and that you can just decide that you're going to be something else than what your biology and what God created you as. There are people that are trying to say that Christianity is evil because we say that sin is sin or that an abortion is good because it gives women the freedom or whatever else might be there. We have politicians constantly trying to deceive and promise the world to us, and how many of them actually follow through on their promises? We have a world that seems to be breaking down and the rule of law seems to be disappearing, and it can be very discouraging for us, very disheartening. But Isaiah's here to tell us that we can take heart, and we can still have trust in the Lord because all of the evil will come to naught. Their end is near.

We know the rest of the story. Even though evil seems to be succeeding in this world, we have the sure and certain Word of God that tells us that we can obtain fresh joy in the Lord because they will come to nothing. Their schemes will end, and the Word of the Lord will endure forever. That is what we have to hold fast to. That is what Isaiah is encouraging us to think about and to understand and to know because right now, it says that the house of Jacob is ashamed and their face grows pale, but he will rejoice when he sees his children. The works of God's hand and that is you and me, the children of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob who call upon the name of the Lord and who believe in the righteousness of God. We are the descendants of Jacob and we

continue in the faith that Jacob had in the one Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. He had hope of the Savior to come. We have knowledge and hope of the Savior who has already come.

It's the same faith, just on different sides of history. We hope with a sure and certain confidence that He will come again, and when He does, all evil will cease and all the plans and schemes of this world will be gone and we will rejoice, and we will be free, and we look forward to that day. In the meantime, what are we called to do? We are called to put our faith and our trust in the Word of God because the Word does what it says it will do.

Now we have this story, and by story I mean a true event that took place. We have Jesus up in the region of Tyre and Sidon and in the Decapolis, so in the northern area of Israel by the sea of Galilee in modern day Lebanon. So you have Isaiah talking about how Lebanon will be restored and a fruitful field. He wasn't talking about an actual harvest of fruits and grains, he was talking about the time of Jesus coming. And here we have Jesus in the area of Lebanon that Isaiah is talking about healing a mute and deaf man, and He does that through some very physical means. I love the imagery. He doesn't always use this quite graphic means of healing, but occasionally, we see it and here is a wonderful time. He sticks His fingers in the ears of the guy. You can imagine what the guy was thinking like, "What is going on here?" I don't know. Somebody comes to you and starts sticking their finger in your ears, you begin to question what they're doing. Then He takes some spit and He sticks it on the tongue of the guy. At this point, the guy's really wondering what's going on, and yet that very physical presence of God, He comes to us in a very real and physical way and He communicates His Word clearly. So He stuck His fingers in the ears and He's put the spit on the tongue and He breathes a sigh. He says, "Ephphatha," be opened, be loosed, be free," and with the Word, he was free.

How can the water, the spit of His tongue, how can that spit do such wonderful things to loose his tongue that he can speak? How can water do such great things? Well, it's not just water, but water connected with the Word of God that does these great things. If you are hearing the catechism and the talk on baptism, you are correct. We should be thinking about this. The Word of God connected with the means of grace, connected with the water, connected with the bread and the wine, they become life-giving gifts of grace and salvation and forgiveness of sins. When He says, "Be opened," it's opened. When He says, "This is My body, this is My blood," it is His body and blood. When He says, "I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," you are made His child because He claimed you and He said, it's true.

God's Word does what He says it's going to do, and so therefore, we trust that Word. The Word of God, the reason that we read the Word of God, the reason that we gather together on Sunday morning to hear the message is not because we need more information. The Word of God, reading the Bible does not just give you instructions and information, like, "Oh, I understand God forgives sins." No. In the hearing of the Word, you get the forgiveness of sins. It does the work when it is spoken. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. Jesus here, when He does these things, when He puts His finger in the ear and He touches the tongue and He speaks, things happen because He is the Word incarnate made flesh. At the very same time, at the very beginning of all creation, the same thing was going on. God spoke His Word and things happened. "Let there be light," the Word created light. "Let there be fish in the sea and birds in the air," and there were. Then He took extra care with us to form us physically, to mold us. Then He breathes into us the breath of life, the presence of the Holy Spirit as He did here with this man. He breathes, He sighs, the presence of the Holy Spirit comes into this man and makes him alive again. Not only is he cured of his deafness and his muteness, but he is given faith. Faith in the Word of God who did what He said He was going to do. And that is our hope today,

and the Word does what it says it's going to do. Now, the Word is a double-edged sword, so we need to hear both sides of the Word. As Paul says, "There was a Word, the letter that was carved in stone that brought death, and that also is the Word of God." So when we hear the Ten Commandments and we understand that we have failed to live up to them. The words, "The wages of sin is death," are true as well, and it does what it says it's going to do. The Word of God brings death, but we can still rejoice in that because that Word that brought death died for us.

See, this is the reason we have Christ on the cross where we have these images of Christ on the cross is because death came because of sin. We remember it, and we see it that God's Word accomplished what He said it was going to accomplish. "The wages of sin is death," the death of Christ. He died because our sins deserved it, and we need to understand that. We need to be clear about the offense that we have given to God in our sin because we need to understand the price that He paid and the hope that we have. If I just stopped at, you are a sinner and you deserve death. That would not be the full counsel of God. The full Word, the Word kills Christ, and then the Word makes alive us. In our baptism with that same Word, that Word then drowns us, our sinful nature, through the Word and the water and our new creation is brought forth. A clean and perfect child of God is brought forth because God's Word declared it to be true. When I say that you are baptized and you are a child of God, that's not just information that you receive. That is the reality of who you are because the Word did it, and you received it, and it is yours. So even though the law was temporary and the work of the law is to condemn and to kill and to bring death, it is still a valuable Word because that Word helps us to know and to look forward to and to desire the next Word of God, which is, "I died to forgive that sin, and by My death you are free from the condemnation." Again, that is not just information for you to receive, that is the reality of who you are, you are forgiven. When I pronounce the words in His stead and by His command, I therefore forgive you all of your sins. I'm not just giving you information, I am giving you the Word of God, literally. You are forgiven because the Word does it, not because I'm holier than everybody else and I've got some extra powers that I can do and forgive your sins. But because I have been made an ambassador of God, I am a steward. As He says, there's no sufficiency in ourselves, I claim nothing is coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God who makes us competent to be ministers of the new covenant. I have been given the gift of being His spokesman. When I speak, it's as if God is speaking directly to you because I am His ambassador. I do not speak my words, I speak the Word of God. That's not just information, that's the truth of the reality of what you are getting and receiving, the forgiveness of sins, life and salvation. The Word does what it says it's going to do, it kills and it makes life.

For that, we rejoice because we know that even though the law does condemn it does not last. What really lasts, what truly lasts is the glory of the grace of God, which is brought to us through Christ. That Word endures forever, and that Word endures forever in us because we endure forever because the Word promises it to be so. In this world, you will have trials and tribulation, but take heart, I have overcome the world. Again, that's not just information, that's reality. He has overcome the world. Evil does not succeed. God is the victor and will continue to be the victor, and we will see His glory when He comes again and we will be free. What a glorious day that will be because God has declared it to be true for you and for me. His Word does not lie, His Word does what He says it will do.

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