

**SERMON SUN. SEPT 8, 2024 “Opened” Hymn “A Mighty Fortress”**

Dear fellow redeemed of, by, and for Christ, the man in our text this morning couldn't hear the birds singing in the morning or his mother's voice at night. He couldn't hear the sound of music or the joy of a laughing child. Most importantly, *he couldn't hear the Word of God.*

Some of you can relate to the man's frustrations because your hearing has started to go, and you can't hear well.

But if you get a hearing aid, voila, most sounds will return! Only then do you realize all that we take for granted and what a gift it is to be able to hear.

And so it was a life-changing event for the man in our Gospel lesson: he was given a gift. The first word he heard in his life was Jesus telling him “**ephhatha,**” and he was *ephhath*-ed. Opened. His ears could hear and his tongue was untied.

In the beginning of creation when God spoke, it was so. For the Word of God even now - is active and does what it says.

Isaiah told us - **when you see the eyes of the blind opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped, when you see the lame man leap like a deer and the tongue of the mute sing for joy** - it will be a sign that God has come to save.

Jesus comes not to meet out vengeance against us for our sins (*as we sometimes fear*),

Jesus didn't primarily come to earth to save us from handicaps and disabilities (*as we sometimes hope*), but to rescue and save us from our real enemies: from sin, death, and the power of the devil.

For you see, handicaps and disabilities are signs too. Signs of a creation corrupted by sin. *Signs that things are not the way God intended them to be.*

Sin has changed us, and not for the better. Which is why it's a good thing that Isaiah foresaw a time when the various aspects of our fallen nature would be reversed. It was only the beginning of many openings when Jesus spoke His "ephphatha" to this man.

There would be many more signs, all pointing to the greatest *ephphatha* of all – when this Word of God - Be opened! - would be spoken to death and the grave.

When the body of Jesus, which not only lost sight, hearing, and speech but life itself, was raised whole and complete again.

In His resurrection, the devastating effects of sin were wiped out—no more corruption, no more captivity to sin, but freedom.

In Jesus, the way things were meant to be **are the way they are again.**

So, the man who was healed in our text was given a foretaste of the complete restoration Jesus had come to bring.

For while yes, he had received his hearing and speech and it probably seemed to him like he had received the world; Jesus had come to do and give so much more than that.

He'd come to give him not the things that belong to this life but an eternal life.

Jesus' miracles are not simply signs of who He is—God in the flesh, demonstrating His divinity and power—but signs of what He has come to do **for you and me**.

Yet, how often are we, like this deaf man, unable to hear God's Word because our ears are clogged with men's words?

Unable to hear God's Word of love because our ears are filled with words of hate.

Unable to hear God's Word of forgiveness because our hearts are hard with anger and resentment.

Unable to hear God's Word of life and hope because we live in a world of death and destruction.

And so, like the deaf/mute man, since we cannot hear God's words, we cannot speak of them.

But as that deaf man was *ephphatha*-ed so has Jesus done for you. Jesus came to you and laid His hands on your head in Holy Baptism. He touches your ears with His Word of forgiveness, and He touches your tongue with the Body and Blood of His Supper, and in all these ways He *ephphathas* you.

Eyes, ears, tongues, hearts, and minds closed by sin are opened in forgiveness. We hear of love, goodness, and life, given to us now as our *foretaste of the feast to come* . . . because the full reality, the full healing and restoration, is still to come.

Just as the man's healing was a sign of a greater work, so the gifts we receive here are leading us to a greater opening - when our graves will be opened, and we will be set free, body and soul, finally, fully, and forever.

For now, there is still suffering, difficulties, and pain in your life, but that's not because Jesus' victory isn't complete for you - **it certainly is!**

Rather, your Father in heaven now mercifully uses trials to teach us to rely on Him and keep us hungry and thirsting for righteousness. Admittedly, suffering and trials often seem anything but merciful on this side of heaven! But they are.

And the victory and life of Jesus, given to us in our baptism, is a *real* victory - but it's not the end of the story; it is the *beginning* of a new, ongoing reality.

Having been made children of God in those waters, in the faith received there, we keep returning to our Father's house to be with Him, hear His Word and sing His praises.

We keep repenting of our sins to be washed again in His forgiveness.

We keep coming back to be fed and strengthened by Him, with Him, with His life, with His Body and Blood.

And we go out again, renewed by His Spirit, and re-gifted with His forgiveness and faith, to live out that faith.

Ah, but what does that mean - *to live that faith?*

James talks about it as doing good works, which he says are signs of a living faith. True enough. But again, *what does that mean?* What does it mean to live a life of faith?

Well, it means to live in confidence that my Savior has given me all that I need.

It means that the life I live now is not all there is but that this life is merely a foretaste of the life to come.

It means, therefore, we are not to hang onto the things of this world and life and be afraid that if we lose them - if we lose my health and wealth, my honor or position, or anything else in this world, I haven't lost **everything**.

For as Luther wrote in the hymn we just sang: ***And take they our life, goods, fame, child, and wife, let these all be gone, they yet have nothing won; the kingdom ours remaineth.***

And so what James said: **I will show you my faith by my works** means that I will show **you what** I believe by what I do.

For everyone believes something. Even Atheists. They believe there is no God and that belief shows in what they do - or don't do.

So, too, with secularism, humanism, environmentalism, whatever "-ism" you like. If you believe it, it shapes you, and if it shapes you it will show in your life. Because that's who you are.

So for Christians, for you and me, *what do we believe?*

Some believe they can do whatever they want because Christ will forgive them later, and they live like that.

Some believe Christ is a new Moses, a new lawgiver, with a new set of rules and regulations, and they live like that.

Some believe Christ has come to make us healthy, wealthy, and wise, and they live like that.

But based on our readings today how do we show our faith in our lives?

Since Jesus has spoken His *epiphatha* to you and set you free from sin, death, and the devil, what does it look like to be set free from idolatry, selfishness, and fear?

It means the freedom to forgive as I've been forgiven.

It is the freedom to love as God first loved me.

It means the freedom to serve because I am served.

It is the freedom to provide for others because my Father provides for me.

We can do all these things because we know we cannot out-give our Father.

As I believe, so I do. I will show you my faith - *what* I believe - by how I live, by my works.

And if you and I struggle to do these things, *you know what?* It's not a works problem; it's a faith problem. Not that you don't have faith, but our faith is sometimes weak.

And so the answer is to be *ephphatha*-ed again, to be opened again, to receive again and again the love and forgiveness and healing of Jesus here for you.

For faith is what changes you as it did for that deaf man. After his encounter with Jesus He wasn't the same. He couldn't stop telling people of all that Jesus did for him - even though Jesus told him not to.

Jesus didn't want to be known just as a healer or miracle worker or even as God came down to earth. ***He wanted to be known as the God who came down to earth to lay down His life on the cross for the life of the world.***

The miraculous signs were important, but first, He had to fulfill their purpose. He had to die for our sins and rise from death so that we could receive the healing of His forgiveness and the resurrection to life everlasting.

So having accomplished His work, NOW, He tells His disciples to go out into all the world. Now is the time to speak and not be silent. To live and love and not be idle.

Now is the time to take Jesus' *ephphatha* into all the world and open all closed *in by* sin.

To speak to them a forgiveness they have never heard before, and show them a love they have never seen before.

To be who you are, who you have been made by Christ your Savior. A child of God. Forgiven and free. An heir of heaven.

All these things. For Jesus ***has done all things well.*** Yes, He has done all things well *for you.* AMEN