

September 8, 2024 at St. Matthew, Port Washington, WI

### Jesus says, “Ephphatha.”

“Open your ears!” If I was not following directions, my dad or a teacher might have said to me, “Open your ears.” That is, “Pay attention.” But what if you can not open your ears? What if you are deaf? Think about everything you would miss. You would not hear the birds chirping in the morning. You would never hear someone say, “I love you.” No music. You would not duck when people told you to look out or laugh when someone told a joke. Life would be difficult to say the least. This morning, we rejoice to hear that Jesus says, “Ephphatha.”

#### To a deaf man

*Notice Jesus’ loving concern*

Jesus was traveling through an area called “The Decapolis.” It was a group of ten cities which were on the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee, away from the Jews. Most of the people there were Greeks. And yet, even they heard about Jesus and the miracles he could perform. In that region, there was a man who was deaf. Since he did not know what words sounded like, he did not know how to talk either. Imagine how confused, probably scared, he was as people grabbed hold of him and forced him toward Jesus. He did not know Jesus or what he could do. The people encouraged Jesus to place his hands on the man and heal him.

Jesus did not owe that man anything. No one offered him any money. Jesus could have simply said, “No. He is obviously surviving. He does not need to hear. I’m busy. Good-bye.” Instead, notice Jesus’ loving concern. He took time from his busy schedule. He agreed to help the man, and in a way that was much more loving than just placing his hands on him. Jesus took the man away from the crowd so he could get his undivided attention. He wanted to communicate to the man what was going to happen to him. What loving concern.

Since the man could not hear, Jesus used sign language to communicate with him. Jesus stretched out his arms and touched the man’s ears, letting him know that he something was going to happen with his ears. Then Jesus spit, symbolizing that he was going to rid of something bad about his mouth. Then he touched the man’s tongue to let him know that he was going to do something with his tongue. Jesus looked up to heaven to indicate that he was going to pray. He took a deep sigh to let the man know

that he was going to say something. Then he spoke, “Ephphatha.” St. Mark records the Aramaic term that Jesus used so you can hear the exact same sounds and syllables that the man first heard. Ephphatha means, “Be opened.” The same powerful Word of God that brought the world into existence at creation was able to instantly cure the man of his deafness and give him the ability to speak. The man’s ears that had never once tickled with sound, those ears that had never heard anything ... listened.

*Notice the amazingness of the miracle*

It is easy to shrug our shoulders, “So Jesus performed another miracle. Big deal.” It certainly was a big deal to that man. It must have been like being released from prison. A whole new world opened to him. When you look closely at it, you notice the amazingness of the miracle. There was something physically wrong with the man that his ears did not work. When Jesus spoke, something physical changed in him. Maybe the three tiniest bones in the human body suddenly aligned. Maybe ear drums instantly formed. Maybe his auditory nerves instantly connected. Did he feel anything happening in his ears? With just a word, Jesus changed something in that man’s body. Amazing.

With the advances in modern medicine, there are all sorts of stories of people who were born deaf, but had some surgery and are now able to hear for the first time. Go on YouTube and you’ll see all sorts of heart-warming stories of people crying tears of joy to hear the voice of loved ones for the first time. However, there is often a lot of exhausting effort that goes with receiving your hearing. As babies grow up, they hear people speak and learn how to imitate the sounds as they speak. If someone has never heard anything before, his tongue does not know how to form words. He does not know what words are supposed to sound like or how nouns, verbs, adjectives and other parts of speech fit together to form a sentence, let alone know the rules of grammar. One boy was born deaf, but received his hearing after a special operation at age 6. All he could say were some “blah-blah” sounds. He spent 11 years in speech therapy before he could talk normally. Others explain that when they can finally hear, their mind gets exhausted as new neural pathways are formed. But none of that happened here in Mark 7. As soon as Jesus spoke, not only could the man hear clearly, but we are told (:35), “**his tongue was loosened and he began to speak plainly.**” He instantly knew how to speak and be understood. It wasn’t just that something happened to his ears. The muscles in his tongue were suddenly developed and the neural pathways in his brain for language were instantly in place. Amazing!

## To our deaf ears

### *Ears that are often closed*

This miracle alone gives us reason to praise and thank our Lord. But it's even more wonderful when we see how this miracle is a reflection of our spiritual condition. None of us wants to be deaf, but there are times when we would like to close our ears, like when a two-year-old is screaming or the music is too loud. There are times when we do not want to hear everything that God tells us. Maybe there are times when we would like to close our ears when Jesus tells us to love one another because we do not want to show love to some people. Or maybe we are inclined to close our ears when God tells us that we should not watch smut on our computer screens or TVs or phones, or when God tells us not to drink too much or not use drugs. Maybe we want to close our ears when God tells us to take other people's words and actions in the kindest possible way but we would rather think evil about them and gossip. Maybe we don't always want to hear God tell us to prioritize time with his word at church and in our home, or when he tells us to stop staring at our phones so much and spend more time praying. There are all sorts of times when we do not want to apply the commandments to our lives. Our sinful nature wants to close our ears and say, "I can't hear you God. I'm going to do whatever I feel like doing."

I don't think anyone in the room today is deaf, but maybe there are times when you do not hear the birds chirping because you only hear the sound of your guilty heart breaking. You know that have not, and can not, show perfect love to those around you. Sometimes the devil screams in your year, "You're guilty!" for some sin you committed long ago. When your conscience nags at you, you can't hear the good news God wants you to hear. There are many times when our ears are closed spiritually and that is worse than not being able to hear the sounds around you.

### *Ears that Jesus lovingly opens*

Just as Jesus was under no obligation to help that deaf-mute, no one could blame Jesus if he left us to struggle with our sin and suffer eternally in hell. What have we ever given God that he should pay us back? He owes us nothing. When Jesus looked into the eyes of the deaf-mute, he could see his confusion and frustration. He saw he needed help. When Jesus looks into your eyes, he sees your hurt, your frustration with life, your confusion, your fears, your pain, your shame, your guilt. As he looks you in the eye, his heart breaks for you. He does not want you to suffer eternally. He wants you to be happy with him forever in heaven.

In absolute, undeserved, unending loving concern, Jesus helps you. Jesus took the deaf-mute aside from the crowd to give him individual attention and he gave you individual attention to you as well. He made sure that there was someone in your life that shared the message of salvation with you. Jesus stretched out his arms to touch that deaf-mute's ears. Jesus also stretched out his arms to let them pound nails through them so that he could save you. On the cross, Jesus got blamed for every sin that you and I and the whole world ever committed or ever will commit. Now you can hear that your sin has already been paid for. You are already forgiven. You are already saved. You now hear Jesus tell you, "I love you." That is so good to hear in our often cold and cruel world. Through faith, you hear Jesus say, "I have loved you with an everlasting love. You are mine. I am preparing a place for you in heaven. I am making everything new." Such good news instinctively moves us to use our mouths to sing praise and thanks to our loving Lord.

After Jesus healed the deaf-mute, he told the people not to tell others. People were already starting to look to Jesus as just some sort of miracle maker, someone who was only going to help people while they were on this earth. Jesus did not use his power to heal the man just so that people would ooh and ahh over him. In today's Old Testament lesson Isaiah said that when the promised Messiah came, the ears of the deaf would be unstopped and the mute tongue would shout for joy. Jesus wanted the people to connect the dots between that Old Testament lesson and the miracle he just performed and recognize that he was the promised Messiah, the Savior whom they needed more than being able to hear with their ears.

For as amazing as it was for Jesus to instantly heal that deaf-mute, the Lord did something even more amazing in your heart. Through the message of salvation, the Holy Spirit led you to recognize Jesus as your Savior and believe that through him you have eternal life in heaven. He gave you faith. Through the message of salvation, Jesus said, "Ephphatha" to you and you can hear that you are saved. Amen.