

TWELFTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

MARK 7:31-37. KJV

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Mark 7:31-37

And again, departing from the coasts of Tyre and Sidon, he came unto the sea of Galilee, through the midst of the coasts of Decapolis. And they bring unto him one that was deaf, and had an impediment in his speech; and they beseech him to put his hand upon him. And he took him aside from the multitude, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spit, and touched his tongue; And looking up to heaven, he sighed, and saith unto him, Ephphatha, that is, Be opened. And straightway his ears were opened, and the string of his tongue was loosed, and he spake plain. And he charged them that they should tell no man: but the more he charged them, so much the more a great deal they published it; And were beyond measure astonished, saying, He hath done all things well: he maketh both the deaf to hear, and the dumb to speak.

1. As the Gospel everywhere shows Christ our Lord to be a merciful and gracious man, ready to help every one by word and deed, in body and soul, so does this Gospel lesson picture to us how willingly he helped this poor man, who was deaf and dumb, in order that we might be invited to believe, trusting to obtain from him all that is good, and also thereby to show unto us an example and a pattern, which every Christian ought to follow, helping his neighbor in the same manner.

2. For a Christian life consists entirely in the following: First, that we believe and trust in Christ our Savior, being fully assured that we are not deserted by him, whatever need or danger may betide us. Secondly, that every Christian person also conducts himself toward friend or foe in the same way, as he sees Christ does, who is so willing to help everyone. Whoever does this, is a Christian; but he who does it not, is no Christian, though he calls himself one. For these two cannot be separated; faith must be followed by its fruits, or it is not true faith. That is the sum of this Gospel lesson.

3. Now some have been agitated over the fact that in this miracle Christ first takes the poor man and leads him apart from the people, performs particular ceremonies, places his fingers in the man's ears, and spits, and touches his tongue, looks up to heaven, sighs and uses peculiar language; whereas he had before helped other mutes and many not mutes without any such ceremonies, merely by a word. All this, I say, has set some to thinking, and they have explained it 'that Christ in this case called to mind how this same man, whom he was now helping would

afterward sin with his tongue and ears; therefore he had pity on him who would commit such sins after this great work was done, and that this deed of mercy would be so ‘little appreciated, in that a speechless tongue should become a blaspheming tongue, which would not only defame his neighbors, but even dishonor God in heaven; and the ears, which were opened in order to hear God’s Word, would rather hear all manner of erroneous and false doctrine, than the Word of God. This, they say, was the reason Christ sighed and looked up to heaven.

4. I will not reject this opinion; [so that it may not be said, that we are never pleased with anything, but want to have everything new and changed.] But, we must not, as it were, confine Christ too narrowly as though he had regard to one person only; we must regard him more highly than that he would help only this man. For all the Holy Scriptures, and particularly the prophets and psalms, declare, that he was sent to have deep compassion on all the misery and need of the whole human race, and that Christ was the person, chosen particularly above all saints, to be so minded toward us as surely to take upon himself all our need and sorrow as though they were his own, as in Psalm 40:12 he says of our sins, “Mine iniquities have over-taken me, so that I am not able to look up,” and in Psalm 41:4, “O Lord, have mercy upon me, heal my soul, for I have sinned against thee.” Here our merciful Lord speaks in our person, bearing our sins as though they were his own, and as though he had committed them himself. And again, Psalm 69:5: “*O God, thou knowest my foolishness, and my sins are not hid from thee*”; again, Isaiah 53:6’ “*The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all*”; and vs. 4-5: “*He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows; the chastisement of our peace was upon him,*” etc. And other passages of Scripture bear witness to this.

5. For the Lord Christ must be painted in such a manner that he is the only person who takes upon himself the misfortune, not of one country, or of one city, but of the whole world; even as St. John names him, John 1:29: “Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world.” But if he bears the sins, it follows that he must also have borne whatever belongs to sin, and what follows sin, as the devil, death and hell.

6. That is the reason he sighs so here, as the person who was to do it, of whom the prophets had long before announced that he would have deep compassion upon all the evils of the whole human race. He was not alone concerned about the tongue and the ears of only this poor man; but it was a common sigh over all tongues and ears in general, yea, over all hearts, bodies, and souls, and all men, from Adam to the last human being, who is yet to be born. Hence he does not chiefly sigh because this man would in the future commit many sins; but the chief reason is that he, Christ the Lord, viewed the entire mass of flesh and blood which the devil afflicted with a fatal hurt in Paradise, making mankind deaf and dumb, and thus thrust them into death and hell fire. This view being before the eyes of Christ, he looked far about him, seeing how great the damage was, inflicted in Paradise by the devil through the fall of one man. He looks not upon those two ears, but upon the whole number of men who had come from Adam, and were yet to come. Therefore this Gospel lesson sets forth Christ as being the man who is concerned about you and me, and about us all in a way that we ought to be concerned about ourselves, as though he were sunk in those sins and afflictions ‘in which we are sunk, and that he sighs over the fact, that the very devil has brought about this ruin.

7. This surely is why he shows such great earnestness in this case, and makes use of special ways and means. As though he would say: “Your deplorable condition, your bondage in sin and death,

affects me so deeply, that moved by nothing but by my own thoughts, I must act in a special manner.” For so extraordinary are his actions in this case, compared to his other works, that it is truly astonishing. He often healed others, or casted out devils, with a single word; indeed, he actually helped some whom he never visited, as for instance the centurion’s servant, Matthew 8:13; here, however, on account of two diseased organs, the tongue and the ear, his actions are very peculiar, as though he were especially concerned. By this he shows us that at this time he had a special view and special thoughts of the human race.

8. For as we admit that Christ, our Lord and God, had all other human traits, sin excepted, we must also concede, that he did not always have the same thoughts, was not always equally disposed, nor always equally fervent; but was variously actuated, just as other saints. Therefore, as his emotions and thoughts were peculiar in this case, his actions were also peculiar, so that we must see how truly human he was in body and soul, whose mind was not at all times alike disposed, just as little as he was always hungry and sleepy at the same time. As these conditions are variable in men, so they were variable in him, as St. Paul says, Philippians 2:7: “He took upon himself the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men, and being found in fashion as a man,” etc. This must not be understood merely of external appearances, but of his soul and the thoughts of his heart, that, being ardent at one time, he was more ardent at another time, etc. This, then, is one reason why Christ here acted thus, namely, because he is a real man; but at the same time a person who stood in the place of all men and took upon himself at the same time the diseases of this man, and of all men.

9. The other thought is also true, that he was deeply grieved by the knowledge that this man, if he would heal him, might sin greatly after he was healed. But it is too narrow to explain it as referring only to the future sins of this man. For it was the task of Christ, our Lord God, to concern himself, and to suffer, not only for one man’s sin but, as we read in Revelation 13:8, for all sins that would be committed from the beginning of the world, from Adam to our time, even unto the last man to be born before the day of judgment. Therefore their view is too narrow who explain it only of those sins which this man would yet do in the future. Although he showed in other instances that he took account of the future life of certain persons, as he said to the paralytic, John :14: “*Thou art made whole, sin no more, lest a worse thing befall thee.*”

10. For Christ, our dear Lord, has so kind a heart that he grieves to think of a person sinning. For he is well aware that sins cannot remain unpunished; therefore he even wept over the city of Jerusalem, because he saw that her sins had to be punished. So kind and loving’ is his heart that he has by no means pleasure where sin is committed.

11. He addresses here particularly two organs of the body, the ear and the tongue; for you know the Kingdom of Christ is founded upon the Word, which cannot be apprehended or understood except by these two organs, the ear and the tongue, and he rules in the hearts of men alone by the Word and by faith. The ears apprehend the Word, the heart believes it; the tongue, however, speaks or confesses that which the heart believes. Hence, barring the tongue and ears, there is no perceptible difference between the Kingdom of Christ and that of the world.

12. For in regard to the outward life a Christian has duties like an unbeliever; he tills the ground, works his fields, and plows just like others, and he undertakes no peculiar work or deed, either in eating, drinking, working, sleeping, or anything else. But these two organs of the body make a

difference between a Christian and an unbeliever; a Christian speaks and hears differently; he has a tongue which praises the grace of God and preaches Christ the Lord as being the only Savior, etc. This the world does not do; it speaks of avarice and other vices, preaches and praises its own glory.

13. In like manner the ears of both differ. A Christian's ears have the same Word which the tongue preaches, and the heart believes; but the world prefers to hear one speak of her wisdom, understanding, honor and glory. The ears and tongues of Christians are thus different from the ears and tongues of the world, or of unbelievers, caring nought for silver or gold, but only for that which is said of Christ, and how to speak and preach Christ.

14. Surely our dear Lord foresaw how much harm and misery would yet be caused by tongues and ears. It does great harm that Christians are persecuted, drowned, burned, and hanged, and that the world sets itself forcibly against the Word; but this harm does not penetrate all, nor will it win. For when it becomes known that persons are dealt with so very unjustly, they only grow bold and fearless thereby and despise such torture and suffering. Hence that is not the greatest injury with which tyrants afflict Christendom; but that piece of flesh which lurks behind the teeth, offers the greatest harm to the Kingdom of Christ. I am not now referring to people lying about and defaming one another; I am speaking of the higher things, that the tongue after Christ has loosed it and has given it the Gospel, should thenceforth inflict such notorious injury. It is true, the injury is not so glaring, and it appears to be much worse if a person's head is struck off, than if a false prophet or writer comes forward; but a false sermon, yea even a false word, which comes whirling along in God's name, will cut off a great number of souls, so that an entire city or country may fall under it.

15. This now is one of the afflictions which caused Christ to sigh; as though he would say: Be watchful! Beware of deceitful tongues which meddle with the Scriptures, more than of those which hold forth in the winehouse or in the grocery-store; though the latter are not harmless, yet when those tongues begin to speak which I have made loose so that they can boast of Christ, beware of them, etc. And in very deed, it is worth while to deplore the fact that those who have the Word and can talk much about it, should nevertheless persecute the Word with tongue and fist. The Turk also is a menace to Christendom, but his harm is inflicted only by the sword, and is in no way equal to the harm done by sectarians. There is need even now that one should sigh because such tongues which mislead so many people and still claim to be Christians, and to have improved the Christian Church. This is the first point, namely, that the devil, after the tongue is loosed and people know what Christ is, still inflicts injury by subverting the doctrine.

16. Hence Christ says, one will find corrupt ears which, though I have opened them, wish to hear nothing else but what such false, evil tongues say. As Paul says, 2 Timothy 4:3' "The lime will come when they will not endure the sound doctrine, but, having itching ears, will heap to themselves teachers after their own lusts, and will turn away their ears from the truth, and will turn aside unto fables," etc. Preachers who teach thus, are rogues and apostles of the devil. Now the others ought to be so godly as to say, I will not listen to their tongues. Aye, says St. Paul, they do not wish to hear the blessed tongue, but seek another; and in truth they find it, as it now happens among the sectarians of our day. Therefore, says St. Paul, as their ears itch, so will he send them preachers who will forcibly lead them into error. Just as we saw, while under the Pope, that no one was able to withstand the slightest error, but their fictitious purgatory, indulgences,

haunting spirits, and whatever was only new, was immediately held to be an article of faith. Thus did the devil rub their ears, so that they were much more willing to listen to such deceit than to the Word of God.

17. It is so even now. Our Lord God opens the ears so that the true Gospel is heard; yet wherever a sectarian turns up, the people immediately accept him, becoming so frenzied and so hostile to the true preachers that I am greatly perplexed how such excellent hearts to whom I would have entrusted body and soul, can grow so spitefully hostile to us, as though they were full of satan and sin much more grievously with tongues and ears than before they had the Gospel, so that it were much better that Christ had never made them whole, and that they had not heard his Word at all.

18. The meaning of Christ's sighs then is, not only that he reviewed in his mind all afflictions from the beginning of the world, but that he deplored the certainty that after the revelation of the Gospel, his Kingdom should suffer so much harm through the very persons whom he would help, and that his Kingdom should be so buffeted and rent, which would not have happened, if men had not first been rescued by him. To be sure, he must bear it, and we must also bear it; but nevertheless, he will not on that account have sighed in vain.

19. And though the nature of his sighs is not fully stated here--for it cannot be written, as St. Paul says, Romans 8:26, that such sighs cannot be expressed in written or spoken words – yet for all that, woe betide those who do such injury and make so little of this sighing, and go forth as though they had done well. For Christ was troubled by this with many and various harrassing thoughts, such as these: Behold, so much does it cost me, so much fear and torture I must bear, until I bring it about that these people hear my Word and preach it; and yet they will so shamelessly falsify and subvert it, and will do to me and my kingdom, such great injury' This ingratitude toward the Word must hurt every Christian soul; hence it is not astonishing that it also moved Christ the lord so greatly, that he here uses special ways and ceremonies, because this thought struck him forcibly at that time.

20. We should learn now from these ceremonies and demonstrative actions, which Christ uses here, how earnestly Christ our Lord cares for us; we should diligently be on our guard to keep our ears and tongues in the condition in which he gave them to us, and fortify ourselves against the devil and against men, lest they change our ears and tongues to the contrary. Secondly, we should also, every one in his calling, show our gratitude toward his Word for this blessing in such a manner that a ruler in his country, a preacher in the pulpit, father and mother in the home, rightly fulfill the duties of their calling, while the others should hear it, keeping open their ears as Christ has opened them, and diligently see to it, as Christ acted in the case of this man, that they may also be as serious, and thank God for it.

21. Among us, God be praised, the tongue has been so developed that we speak purely, and that the ears gladly hear it; for there still are many pious people everywhere who take delight in hearing God's Word. But side by side with this there is great ingratitude also among us, and frightful contempt for the Word of God, perhaps, indeed, a secret persecution and suffering. Other princes persecute it openly; but we here sit under shelter, as in a garden of roses, and yet secretly there are so many, citizens and peasants, and the noblemen with their golden chains, who

would gladly hound all pastors and preachers out of tile country, if only they could do it. This shows that they despise the Word and hate it secretly; as we see it is the case that, where the Word is persecuted openly, there only it would live, and where it is unhindered and public, there they do not want it.

22. But our Lord God will surely not have sighed in vain. Some think, indeed, that it will always remain so, because he keeps so silent about it; but it happens very quickly that a pulpit changes its character. Therefore our Lord God wants us here to take warning, as it was also predicted by St. Paul, in order that we should beware. Tongues will change their speech, and the ears of the people will itch after false preachers, even as it came to pass under the Pope's rule, where people were so willing and eager to hear and to do, whenever anyone came along who had something new to say, no matter how unreasonable and foolish it might be. At that time, if anyone had risen to preach that a church should be built in the river Elbe, they would have done it. But now that the Word is being taught and preached from the pulpit, to trust in God and to serve our neighbor, the lives of the people nowhere are conformed to it. That is the doings of the very devil, but this does not excuse us.

23. For since the doctrine has been brought into such shape and form that the articles of faith are preached in their purity, and since the tongues are now loosed and the ears are opened, we should also apply ourselves that this doctrine may show itself in our daily lives. But I fear it will not be done before lightning and thunder strike down upon us, as St. Paul says. God has already made a beginning with the Pope, striking the Antichrist with the lightning of the Gospel, which is the Spirit of his mouth, which is now opened and speaks, and is still striking among the wicked; but I fear the teaching will not be followed by right living, until he will come and strike everything to the ground completely, making an end of ungodliness by the manifestation of his glorious coming, 2 Thessalonians 2:8.

24. Now since righteous works and living do not seem to follow the doctrine so perfectly among us as they indeed ought, I fear that our Lord God, unless the day of judgment should break in upon us, will not let his punishment be deferred; for our lives are not at all in agreement with the doctrine, not even in the least thing, as that we should serve our neighbor, which truly is not a great requirement. For there is no need to run to Rome nor to St. James, nor to give money or anything valuable to obtain it; all you need is to give your will to do it. But since we are such desperate people who, after having done only too much under the Pope, do nothing now so either the day of judgment must strike in our midst, or our Lord God will send heresies and then we will be compelled again to do unnecessary works. It is a matter of great concern to Christ, the Lord, that his Word should thus be despised and per secured; therefore those who are the cause of it will not go unpunished. Let this suffice concerning this text. [Let us pray to our Lord God to give us his grace, that we may so act and live as he has enabled us to speak and hear. Amen.]

