

## Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost – September 9, 2018

### Mark 7:31-37

31 Then Jesus left the vicinity of Tyre and went through Sidon, down to the Sea of Galilee and into the region of the Decapolis. 32 There some people brought to him a man who was deaf and could hardly talk, and they begged him to place his hand on the man. 33 After he took him aside, away from the crowd, Jesus put his fingers into the man's ears. Then he spit and touched the man's tongue. 34 He looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him, "Ephphatha!" (which means, "Be opened!"). 35 At this, the man's ears were opened, his tongue was loosened and he began to speak plainly. 36 Jesus commanded them not to tell anyone. But the more he did so, the more they kept talking about it. 37 People were overwhelmed with amazement. "He has done everything well," they said. "He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak."

If you think back to your school days (or if you are currently a student), there always seemed to be a few fellow students who excelled at everything they tried. Perhaps you remember some of them. They were good students in the classroom, they were good athletes, they were good at music, they were good at public speaking or even acting, they were good in relationships and had lots of friends. Now perhaps at the time we were a bit jealous because God had blessed them with an abundance of gifts and we wished we could do all those things too. But at the same time we had to stand in awe because it just seemed that they could do everything well. That was the description given for Jesus in our sermon text by those who were amazed at the miracle he had performed. And so we will use their words, "He Has Done Everything Well" to look at this specific miracle of Jesus and apply them to our lives, especially when we face times of suffering.

Verse 31 starts off by setting the scene for this miracle: "Then Jesus left the vicinity of Tyre and went through Sidon, down to the Sea of Galilee and into the region of the Decapolis." Jesus was spending time outside of Judea and Galilee, Tyre and Sidon were up to the north. In the previous verses Jesus had met a Gentile woman, who came pleading for Jesus to heal her daughter who was possessed by a demon. After healing her, he commended her for her great faith (Mt 15). Now he was traveling down into the region of the Decapolis, the Ten Cities, which was east of the Jordan River. This was a largely Gentile area as well. Scripture records a previous visit of Jesus to this area in Mark 5. There he had healed a man possessed with many demons which then drove the pigs into the sea. The people pleaded for Jesus to leave while the healed man told people in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him (Mk 5:20).

These previous events could help to explain verse 32: "There some people brought to him a man who was deaf and could hardly talk, and they begged him to place his hand on the man." We don't know exactly how or why these people came to Jesus and whether or not they were believers. But they knew Jesus could help. The same is true of the man they brought—we don't know his exact circumstances. He was deaf so that he could not hear, how long he had had this condition, we don't know. He was not totally mute and unable to speak, but he could hardly talk. He may have been able to talk at one point in his life, but his deafness made intelligible speaking difficult, if not impossible.

We can see the care and concern of Jesus in how he performed this miracle: "After he took him aside, away from the crowd, Jesus put his fingers into the man's ears. Then he spit and touched the man's tongue. He looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him, 'Ephphatha!' (which means, "Be opened!"). At this, the man's ears were opened, his tongue was

loosened and he began to speak plainly” (vv. 33-35). This man may have had no idea what was going on and who this man was. Jesus took him aside for his benefit, to keep the focus on him and not on the crowd watching Jesus. The fingers in the ears, the spitting, the touching of the man’s tongue would seem to simply be Jesus’ way of signaling to him what was going to happen. Looking up to heaven also would signal to the man that this was the work of God. The deep sigh of Jesus could simply be Jesus’ reaction to curse of sin on this world and its heavy effects on this man. And then Jesus showed his power—with one word, Ephphatha, the man was cured. There was no gradual process, there was no waiting period, immediately he could hear and he was able to speak plainly.

The reaction of the crowd was understandable: “People were overwhelmed with amazement. ‘He has done everything well,’ they said. ‘He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak’” (v. 37). These things didn’t normally happen. Whether or not they were familiar with Isaiah’s prophecy that we heard in our first lesson (35:5-6), here it was being fulfilled. As with all of his miracles, this proved that Jesus was no mere man, but he was also true God.

Jesus knew what the crowd’s reaction would be. In the previous verse, “Jesus commanded them not to tell anyone. But the more he did so, the more they kept talking about it” (v. 36). Jesus was not there to simply be a miracle worker. While the crowds would have been content with that, he had a greater purpose—to continue his mission of living and dying in their place to save them from their sin and an eternal death in hell. He truly had come to do everything well.

The unbelief of this world looks at the claim that God does everything well and laughs. How could God do everything well when he allows sickness and disease, suffering and sadness, war and natural disasters to take place? No loving God would allow such things to happen and so then they use that to justify their belief that there is no God who exists. The claim that God has done everything well echoes the end of Genesis and God’s verdict on his creation: “God saw all that he had made and it was very good” (Ge 1:31). In the beginning everything about this world was perfect and holy, God never wanted suffering. But then Adam and Eve fell into sin and the curse of sin fell on everything in this world. Suffering is not God’s fault, it is the fault of all human beings as we continue to sin each and every day.

And still God has done all things well. He did not wipe everything out and start all over. Undoubtedly any replacements would have sinned as well. So instead he set in motion his plan of salvation to send his Son to save us from sin and death by his own life and death. He has not removed suffering from this world, but set up the way for us to exit from this world and suffering and go to him to enjoy an eternal life in heaven.

This brings us to the times of suffering that we face in our lives, as we look back to what we have experienced or are currently facing or will deal with in the future. In those times how can we say that God has done everything well? First, we recognize that God prevents suffering in our lives. Even for all the times that we have faced suffering, we cannot know how many times God has saved us from more suffering or worse suffering in our lives. Second, we know that God does deliver from suffering. Whether by miraculous or natural means, God does at many times allow our suffering to end. Like the deaf man whose life was totally changed, it is a wonderful thing when God brings us relief from whatever has troubled us. And finally, we know that at times God will allow suffering to remain in our lives. While these are the hardest times to acknowledge that God has done everything well, he has promised to preserve us so that we can endure such suffering until it finally ends whether here on earth or in our home in heaven. Such suffering serves to keep bringing us back to God because only in him can we find any hope of

relief, only in him can we find the purpose, the reason, for continuing to live our lives as we wait for whatever plans he has for us.

Whether or not you knew students who excelled at everything in school, whether or not you were one of those students yourself, we all know the one who has done everything well. Jesus not only healed the deaf man and gave him back his hearing and speech, but more importantly would complete his mission so that this man could be saved from sin, death and the power of devil. And the same is true for us. As we live in a world surrounded by suffering we can continue to proclaim that God has done everything well. He has taken care of our spiritual needs by forgiving our sins and promising us an eternal life with him. As we wait for that day, he will prevent suffering and remove suffering and helps to us endure the suffering that remains. Through it all we too can be overwhelmed with amazement and say, “He has done everything well.” Amen.