

The Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost
September 27, 2009
Amazing Grace Lutheran - Pastor Chip Wilke

Mark 7:31-37

Then Jesus left the vicinity of Tyre and went through Sidon, down to the Sea of Galilee and into the region of the Decapolis. 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. 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. Jesus commanded them not to tell anyone. But the more he did so, the more they kept talking about it. People were overwhelmed with amazement. "He has done everything well," they said. "He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak." (NIV)

Does anything amaze us anymore? Do you remember your first T.V., radio, or computer? Remember thinking how amazing those things once were. Those old things can't even compare to the technology we enjoy now. Has what once seemed pretty amazing now just become old hat? I remember the first time I printed directions off on my computer from map quest and thinking how great that was compared to the old maps my parents tried to use which usually left us pulling over somewhere asking for directions. But now people just plug devices into their car that tell them exactly where to go and the best way to get there and exactly how long it will take them. Remember when only the very rich would have a phone in their car. Many of you probably had several phones in your car on the way to church this morning. Now our phones can also take pictures or even give updates on the scores or weather. Recall the emotions and the excitement when Neil Armstrong walked on the moon. Today, most people don't bat an eye or even notice when a space shuttle blasts off unless something goes wrong.

So I ask once again: does anything amaze us anymore? Since there are so many exciting things in our world and age we live in have we become dulled? Is it hard for us to get excited about something? Dear friends: I pray we do not ever become dulled or lose the excitement of watching Jesus in action. In fact, I pray we find ourselves, like the people in our text, being overwhelmed with amazement. For to say that Jesus does all things well is an understatement. The truth I want us to consider was true yesterday, is true today, and will be true forever: **Our Savior Still Amazes.**

Jesus and his disciples entered the region of the Decapolis, the Greek name for ten cities. These cities on the east southeast side of the Sea of Galilee were highly influenced by Greek culture and populated mainly by Gentiles. Jesus had been in this area at least once before and obviously His reputation preceded Him. Here we read *"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."* What a sad case this is that the people bring to Jesus! I can't imagine living my life without hearing a single sound. Imagine not just being deaf, but because you can't hear sounds you are not able to talk either - at least speak words clearly. How miserable! Picture the daily frustration. Think of the isolation and loneliness of living your life without being able to communicate with those

around you. It would be like living in your own personal prison cell. It is no wonder they brought this man to Jesus and begged Jesus to do something.

Jesus does something, but not in front of the crowds. Jesus pulls this man aside and then ***“Jesus put his fingers into the man's ears. Then he spit and touched the man's tongue.”*** It has always been interesting to me to look at the different ways Jesus performed miracles. The more I study them the more I come to the conclusion that we have a Savior who knows us - each one of us. Jesus sees our hearts. Jesus knows our needs and our fears and is able to meet each of us with what we need individually. Think of this man - he couldn't hear so Jesus reassures this man with signs to let him know what's happening. Jesus personally touches the man's ears and tongue as if to say it is going to be okay. I'm going to take care of it. Jesus wants the man to know exactly what He is doing.

Then ***“he looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him, “Ephphatha!” (which means, “Be opened!”)***. Jesus does two more things. He looks to heaven to let this man know that His help comes from above. God will heal this man. Jesus also sighs. His sigh shows sadness for this man - it shows that He knows that there is something wrong with this sin filled world - it shows He cares and He loves. May this be a reminder to us that we too have a Savior who was familiar with suffering - a Savior who was a man of sorrows - a Savior who is able to sympathize with us in our weaknesses. But our Savior is also able to do something to help us in our weakness and that is exactly what Jesus does here with His powerful Word. One Aramaic word was all it took, ***“Ephphatha!” (which means, “Be opened!”)*** Mark allows us to hear the actual syllables Jesus speaks. He allows us to feel like we are standing right there with Jesus.

He wants us to see something amazing because something amazing happens. ***“At this, the man's ears were opened, his tongue was loosened and he began to speak plainly.”*** If we can imagine being deaf perhaps we can imagine the joy of hearing for the first time. Do you think this man ever took a singing bird for granted? Now he could hear - his friends - his family - Jesus. Not only could he hear but he could talk - more than just sounds or grunts that made people roll their eyes or ignore him. He could speak plainly. He could talk to others - share his thoughts and needs and wants and ideas. He was freed from his prison. The frustration, the isolation, the loneliness was over. He could communicate like everyone else.

Would that amaze you? Does that amaze you? It did those in the area of Decapolis. ***“Jesus commanded them not to tell anyone. But the more he did so, the more they kept talking about it. People were overwhelmed with amazement. “He has done everything well,” they said. “He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak.”*** Jesus didn't want any more attention drawn to Him that might take away from the real reason He came so He told others to keep quiet. But how could they? They were overwhelmed by what they saw from Jesus. They stood in awe of His mercy, and power, and love. Everything He did, He did well. Literally, the Greek reads ***“good, in everything He has done.”*** As God said about our world before sin so people could say of Jesus that He was very good. Jesus was perfect. He could even make the deaf hear and the mute speak.

Do you wonder how long the amazement lasted? We hear they kept talking about it but I wonder for how long. Did the amazement wear off and the story become old hat? How about for us? The Greek word here for deaf is also a word that could be translated

dull or blunt. Does that ever describe our faith? Do we feel like we have already heard all the stories in Sunday School - that we know Jesus so well that He was yesterday's news? Why is it when Jesus tells them not to say anything they told everyone, but when Jesus tells us to tell everyone so often we remain silent and tell no one? Are we really amazed by Jesus anymore?

Whenever we start to become dulled and lose our excitement or amazement over Jesus we need to go back to His Word and look at exactly where we were and what He has done for us. We were even a far more pathetic case. We were once far worse off than this man who was deaf and mute. We were spiritually deaf. We could not hear God's truth or speak His praises. We could not come close to speaking plainly to what Jesus had done. Our spiritual deafness kept us from hearing any good thing, kept us in darkness, and would have landed us in an eternal prison cell in hell. We could do nothing to change it. We could not speak a word that would free us.

So the One who does all things well came for us - for each and every one of us. He came to the manger to take our place. He came to a cross carrying our sins. He came out of the tomb to assure us everything will be alright with God and us. By His life and by His sacrifice Jesus won for us and all the world salvation. Then Jesus came to us with this good news and said "***Ephphatha!***" He opened our ears to hear a message of forgiveness, of peace, of joy, of love. Remember hearing that good news about Jesus for the first time. Jesus said at our baptisms "be opened" and our hearts held Him tight in faith. Jesus says "be opened" and our lips come unsealed to sing His praise and tell others of His wonders. Now that we are His, Jesus still knows our fears and our needs and He still cares for us. In His Holy Supper Jesus reaches out and touches each one of us personally with forgiveness and strengthening.

There is no doubt about it - our Savior still amazes. His mercy, and power, and love leave us overwhelmed and saying He does all things well. To know a sinner like me stands completely forgiven before God each and every day is nothing less than amazing. To know God's love will never fail you - to know you are saved - to know a mansion has been prepared for you - to know Jesus - to hear His Word and be able to sing His praise, is to be amazed. Isn't it a wonderful feeling to have something that still excites us? Yes, our Savior still amazes! Amen.