

The Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost (Outdoor Worship)

September 13, 2015

Amazing Grace Lutheran Church – 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)

We just read in our Gospel about a crowd of people who were overwhelmed with amazement. Have you ever been overwhelmed with amazement? What amazes you? I don't know if a whole lot does today, does it? We have seen such advancements in technology and medicine that it's tough to amaze us. For example recall the excitement and emotions on the day Neil Armstrong walked on the moon. But today people don't bat an eye or even notice when a space shuttle blasts off – unless something goes wrong of course. So do you find anything amazing?

I don't know about being overwhelmed with amazement but I do want to share a story about something that once amazed me. We grew up right next to an old building that used to be a one classroom school. Now it was just used for storage of old desks and tables and other things that were never really used. My dad had warned us about not throwing things too close to the building so we wouldn't break anything. One day my brother and I were playing catch near the building when my parents weren't around. Then we decided to draw a strike zone on the building and practiced pitching to see who could hit the target more. Then on one pitch I tried to throw it as fast as I could and the ball sailed out of my hand high and right through a window. When my dad noticed and asked if we broke the window I said "no." But later I felt guilty for lying and I went to my dad to tell him the truth. When I began to tell him what happened he stopped me and said: *"I already know what happened. Your bother came and told me it was his fault."* Now that amazed me! My brother was willing to take the blame and even punishment for what I did. Children, would that amaze you if your brother or sister did that for you?

On this beautiful morning my prayer is you are even more amazed by our Savior who does everything well. We watch yet another example of Jesus' power and love. We witness again God's mercy and compassion. We see again the good gift Giver at work. As we do I pray we never stop being: **Overwhelmed with Amazement.**

Jesus and his disciples entered the region of the Decapolis, the Greek name for ten cities. These cities on the 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.” Can you imagine living life without hearing a single sound? Imagine not just being deaf, but not able to talk either - at least speak words clearly. That would be awful for me! How sad and 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 **“Jesus put his fingers into the man's ears. Then he spit and touched the man's tongue.”** I find it interesting 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.”** Jesus looks to heaven to let this man know where His help is coming from - **“every good and perfect gift comes from above.”**

Then with a deep sigh Jesus spoke just one Aramaic word, **“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. He wants us to see something amazing. **“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 free from his prison. The frustration, the isolation, the loneliness was over. He could communicate like everyone else.

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. As God said about our world before sin so people could say of Jesus that He was very good. Jesus was perfect. He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak.

So are you amazed by Jesus? Are you overwhelmed with amazement? Sadly, so often we are barely amused let alone amazed. I see it in our attitude toward His Word. I see the lack of amazement in our lives. Here Jesus tells them not to tell anyone but they tell everyone. Jesus commands us to tell everyone about Him, but how many days, weeks, or perhaps months go by where we tell no one. What is amazing is just how apathetic, how indifferent, how selfish and self-centered, really how sinful you and I are!

This, dear friends, is why there is always one thing that truly amazes me. (Hold up cross) Every time I look at a cross I am overwhelmed with amazement. I pray you are too! For there on the cross Jesus did something far more amazing than what my

brother did for me. There Jesus took all my sin. There Jesus suffered my full punishment. Jesus took all the blame and guilt for me. Now I am forgiven, redeemed, and set free. There Jesus died for us so that we might live. The apostle John writes that if you are amazed by this then just wait: ***“For a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear (Jesus’) voice and come out.”*** (John 5) In heaven with Jesus you and I will know what it is to be overwhelmed with amazement every day!

Until that day I pray you are thankful for a Savior who does everything well and a God who gives you every good gift. Be thankful that you have ears to hear. Use your ears to keep hearing God’s Word. Be thankful that you have a mouth to speak. Use your mouth to tell others about Jesus and His great love. Pray that through our witness the ears and mouths and hearts of others might ***“Ephphatha!”*** Then we can stand together to see Jesus and His cross and be overwhelmed with amazement. Amen.