

Saint Thomas' Church
Trinity XII
September 8, 2019

Ephphatha . . . be opened

At first blush, the story in today's Gospel seems to be only another of the healing miracles; one of so many that Our Lord performed as to become routine reading in the New Testament. But there are some singular aspects of this one that make it worthy of some attention and thought.

The story marks a pivotal point in Our Lord's earthly ministry:

We celebrated the Transfiguration a few weeks ago
That mysterious time when Jesus
took Peter John and Andrew
to a mountain
and with visions of Moses and Elijah
was mysteriously transformed
and prepared for His crucifixion, resurrection and
ascension.

from that point Jesus directed his earthly ministry
toward its dramatic and crucial conclusion.

In today's Gospel, we begin to see the new direction.
Jesus has been at the Mediterranean coast.

The most western point in His travels.
And He has turned around, pivoted to the East
and is walking toward Jerusalem, where it would all
take place.

So it is a geographic pivot point.
But before leaving the geography:
Note that the story takes place where there are no Jews.
We can tell from where Jesus was,
that the deaf and dumb man
was not a Jew.

Jesus was ministering to gentiles.
He was available to all people,
not just to the Children of Israel;
not a surprise to us today
but a radical notion 2000 years ago.

Note also the timing of the event:
The story takes place only 6 months before Jesus would be
crucified.

It is also something of a pivot point marking a change in
His ministry.
He inexorably faces Jerusalem
and after this event,
this pivotal point,
He demonstrates His messianic calling.
He undertakes to show the world who He is
. . . the Messiah. Watch what happens in this and the
remaining Gospel narratives as Jesus' time is rapidly
arriving. He takes off the wraps and increasingly
demonstrates who He is.

Back to the remarkable story:

Put yourself in the deaf and mute man's sandals for a moment:

The man's friends gather him up and present him to Jesus. Perhaps pushing him along

Can you imagine what he must have thought.

He could not hear what was being said,
but could see that he was being brought to
this man he had never seen before,
for a reason that he could not know.

He was being led somewhere.

Was he being accused of something?

Does some arrest or prosecution await him?

Without being able to hear their words, the man can make no sense of what they are doing or why.

Jesus most often ministered to people in full view of the multitude.

But this man, he took aside. Out of sight of the crowd.

The man must have been fearful, but he had no way to voice his trepidation.

In most of the other accounts of His healings,

Jesus usually healed people by merely speaking the word

or by placing his hand on them.

Not so here.

He placed his fingers in the man's ears,

spit

and placed His finger on the man's tongue.

He sighed,
looked up to the heavens
and said in his native Aramaic language
“Ephphatha” . . . “Be Opened”.
That was the first word that the deaf man ever heard,
Ephphatha. Spoken by no less than the Son of God.

But note once Jesus restored the man’s hearing, He didn’t
stop there.

Jesus restored the man’s hearing so that he could receive
the sound of the world,

So he could hear the Word of God;
(catch the double meaning: the Word of God is
scripture
and the Word is Jesus in John’s Gospel)

So the man hears the Word of God

But then Jesus restored his voice so that the man could
speak the Word of God,

give it away to others.

The blessing was not in the gift of hearing, but in the
giving of it to others with his voice.

St Mark tells us of one of the immediate impacts of this
healing. The people were beyond measure astonished;
He had done all things well.

Unlike people today,
the Jews knew their Bible,
and knew that the prophets Is and Ezech et.al had said
the Messiah would make the deaf to hear
And the dumb to speak
Jesus had fulfilled the prophesy. The Jews had to wonder
whether the Messiah had finally come.

Can we help but wonder how the formerly deaf mute spent
the rest of his life.

What he must have thought
when he heard (now that he could hear)
that his healer had been crucified,
but had returned from the dead.

Now that he could speak, what must he have said of the
man who had restored him to the world?

But what of us?

We live in a time that some want to be known as, the “post”
Christian era. As if Christianity and its influence has passed
away.

Secularists seek to eradicate all vestiges and reminders of
God from our lives.

Our public schools and universities teach atheism and scorn
Christianity to our children as
unenlightened,
unscientific.
unintellectual

It seems that our faith is challenged on a daily basis. If it was ever easy to be a Christian, with all the criticism and controversy, it is not easy now.

Through it all Have we become deafened?
Have we become muted?
Have we become the Gentile deaf and dumb man in St Mark's story?
Do we need our Lord's healing,
His fingers in our ears and on our tongue?

Ephphatha . . . Be opened.

Be opened to Him:

Accept Him:

Let Him in to our lives

Let Him place His fingers in our ears that we may clearly hear the Word of God

Let Him touch our hearts that we may know the love of God

The Peace of God

Be opened to Him

Every time we receive Him in Communion at the altar,
receive Him and be opened

Every time we go to Him in our private prayers,

Every time we pray the Daily offices

Be opened to Him and just as the sound waves
that reach your mind,

let Him in to your soul in prayer

But that is only the first part.

We are Christians.
As we saw last week
The Grace of God, is not something we receive
That it can be bottled up inside us
and to ourselves consume.

We must “Be opened” to express the Word of God in our
lives:: to let it out:

He has loosed our tongues
He has freed our hearts
We must Give voice to the Word of God
Here at St Thomas
And out there in our lives

Be opened and He will let you know His will
Let us Be Opened and express his Word in our lives

Be not afraid to speak the word of God
Even out in the World
When God presents the opportunity
Say grace before meals
even in restaurants

Reflect Him in how we live our lives
That may be the most powerful means we have to
spread the Gospel

Be the example of Christian life
to all who know,
see
or hear us.

Ephphatha . . . Be Opened