**Listen, Jesus does all things well**

Text: Mark 7:31-37

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**Scriptures:** Isaiah 35:1-6; Mark 7:31-37

**Songs Chosen:** [SttL] 371, 30, 123, 389, 523

**Series:** Mark’s Gospel (#21)

**Theme:** In the Gentile region of Decapolis, when Jesus healed a deaf man with a speech impediment the people there were amazed and told others that He did all things well.

**Proposition:** Jesus, through the work of the Holy Spirit, opens our ears to hear the gospel and our mouths to speak the good news to others.

**Introduction**

Can you hear me? The ability to communicate with words is one of the gifts that we have as creatures made in the image of God. It was the spoken Word of God that started this creation. “*By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible*” (Heb 11:3). God, but not mankind, was there at the start of space and time and He has told us in words what He did. What He said.

This is how Holy Scripture starts: ‘*In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. And* ***God said****, "Let there be light," and there was light*’ (Gen 1:1-3).

The Living God is the God who speaks so that we can hear His Words of life, of law, of truth and of grace. The gospel is good news – conveyed with words. When we lose the ability to hear we cannot receive verbal communication through our ears. I remember how troubling I found it earlier this year when I suffered substantial hearing loss following my COVID infection. I am thankful that I have now regained most of this.

A number of people in our congregation have hearing aids and know the distress of not being able to hear clearly without them. When we lose the ability to speak clearly this is also distressing as those who have suffered from speech impediments like stammering, or slurring due to a stroke can testify. People who are deaf and/or who have difficulty speaking clearly are often ignored and isolated by others.

In our text today from Mark’s gospel, Jesus heals a deaf man with a speech impediment. This points us to the reality that Jesus, through the work of the Holy Spirit, opens our ears to hear the gospel and our mouths to speak the good news to others. So, keep your ears open as we come to the preaching of God’s Word! Firstly, we see in our text a deaf man in need.

1. **The deaf man in need**

Do you remember the Syrophoenician woman from the previous passage in Mark’s gospel? As a Gentile, Jesus likened her to a domestic dog who only gets fed after the children in the household have been given something to eat. In a few metaphorical words, Jesus spoke of the priority of the Jews over the Gentiles in God’s plan of salvation (ref also Rom 1:16). The main earthly ministry of Christ was to the ‘*lost sheep of the house of Israel*’ (Matt 15:24), but He did not exclude Gentiles, as the great faith of the woman from the Phoenician region of Tyre and Sidon evidences.

In our text today, Jesus is ministering again in a region that was largely populated by non-Jews. The region of the Decapolis (which means ten cities) was mainly to the west of the Sea of Galilee and the Jordan river. Mark records that the people there brought a needy man to Jesus. You might ask how they knew anything about Christ. The likely answer is that they had heard about Jesus from the man who had been delivered from possession by a legion of demons (Mark 5:1-20). Remember that when he was healed this man ‘*went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him, and everyone marvelled*’ (Mark 5:20).

This needy man who was also in the region of the Decapolis was deaf and had a speech impediment. The English word ‘impediment’ means ‘*a hindrance or obstruction to doing something*’. Most of us don’t use the English word ‘impediment’ very often, if at all. Similarly the Greek word translated ‘speech impediment’ is only used once in the New Testament – here in Mark 7:32. Interestingly and significantly this same word is used in the Greek Old Testament (the Septuagint) in Isaiah 35:6 “*then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the* ***mute*** *sing for joy*”. Mark is using this particular Greek word to reveal that Jesus is the promised Messiah who would bring healing to those in need (amongst other blessings). He is the Servant of the Lord who heals the mute.

Mark’s gospel was written especially for Gentile readers. Many of these Greek-speaking people in the 1st century would have been familiar with the Greek translation of the Old Testament. As they read about Jesus’ healing of the paralytic (Mark 2:12), the man with the withered hand (Mark 3:1-6), the demon possessed man (Mark 5:1-20), and now a deaf and mute man they would see evidence that Jesus is the Messiah. Remember that a key purpose of Mark’s gospel is to reveal the true identity of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

The people who brought the man to Jesus ‘*begged him to lay his hand on him*’ (v32). In the Old Testament, the significance of laying on of hands included inflicting harm (e.g. Gen 22:12, Ex 7:4), symbolically transferring sin (e.g. Lev 16:21) and officially commissioning a person to an office (e.g. Num 8:10). In the New Testament, the laying on of hands is usually either to heal – as Jesus did for many sick people (e.g. Mark 6:5) or to bless – as Jesus did for the little children who came to Him (Mark 10:16). It seems likely that the people were expecting a blessing in this case, not a healing, because when Jesus restored the man’s hearing and speech they were ‘*astonished beyond measure*’ (v37). Jesus responded to this afflicted man’s greatest physical needs, but not in the way we might expect, which brings us to our second point.

1. **The personal touch of Jesus**

Have you ever been to see your doctor or a medical specialist, and they seem to treat you ‘like a number’ with little or no interest in your own individual situation? Some impersonal physicians can appear not to care much for the individual patients they treat.

Jesus, the ‘Great Physician’, is not like that. This should not surprise us because God chooses His own individualised methods to work in the lives of different people for example: Naaman was told by Elisha to wash in the Jordan seven times (2 Kings 5:10-14); God kept Jacob’s family alive through the evil that Joseph’s brothers did to him (Gen 50:15-21); Paul suffered from a troublesome ‘*thorn in the flesh*’ (2 Cor 12:7-10).

The way Jesus, during His earthly ministry, related to different people reflected their diverse situations. For example:

1. With the Syrophoenician woman, He healed her daughter ‘at a distance’ without ever touching her, because He wanted to test and reveal the woman’s great faith (Mark 7:30).
2. He commanded the demons to leave the tormented man in the country of the Gerasenes (5:1-20).
3. He told the man with a withered hand to stretch it out (2:5).
4. He told the paralytic to get up, pick up his bed and go home (2:11).
5. He touched the ‘unclean’ leper and said, ‘be clean’ (1:41).
6. With the deaf man, talking to him would not have been kind or helpful. Why? Because he could not hear!

Mark records six things that Jesus did in healing the deaf man with a speech impediment:

1. **Firstly**, Jesus took him aside (cf. Mark 5:37) from the crowd – thereby establishing a personal connection with him. This would also likely have put the man more at ease.
2. **Secondly**, Jesus put his fingers in the man’s ears; effectively communicating with the man by sign language, showing him what he was about to do.
3. **Thirdly**, Jesus spat and then touched his tongue. It has been suggested that Jesus spat on his own finger and then touched the man’s tongue with his wet finger. This is plausible, although the Scripture does not reveal these details. The touching of the man’s tongue, together with putting his fingers in the man’s ears demonstrated that Jesus would convey His own life and health to the suffering man.
4. **Fourthly**, Jesus looked up to heaven thereby indicating that His help came from above (Ps 25:15; 121:1; 123:1,2; 141:8; 145:15; John 11:41: 17:1; Acts 7:55). The healing that was about to take place was not the result of some earthly magical powers but by the power of God.
5. **Fifthly**, Jesus sighed – expressing the strong emotion of sadness in the presence of the ravages of disease in this fallen world. This was a sympathetic sigh. The sorrows of this man were deeply felt by Christ. Jesus had a compassionate personal interest in this afflicted person.
6. **Sixthly**, Jesus said ‘Ephphatha’ which Mark helpfully translates for His readers as meaning ‘be opened’. These words were addressed to the man in his native Aramaic. Imagine having not heard a sound for many years and then to have the long silence instantaneously broken with the clear sound ‘Ephphatha’.

Mark records that ‘*his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly*’ (v35). Nobody is ‘just a number’ to Jesus. He is the Son of God, the image of the invisible God (Col 1:15). whose thoughts and ways are far above ours (Isaiah 55:8). He is absolutely holy, perfectly righteous, and highly exalted (Phil 2:9). Yet Jesus is also approachable, kind, understanding and personal. He sympathises with our weaknesses (Heb 4:15), tempted as we are, yet without sin. Through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, Jesus personally, and individually, touches all who come to Him in faith. He does not minister to us all in the same way, but works for our individual good in ‘tailor-made’ ways.

There is no one like Jesus, He alone has the words of eternal life (John 6:68). When the Holy Spirit opens our ears to hear and believe that Jesus is the Son of God, the Saviour and Lord of God’s people then He also gives us the ability to speak the gospel without impediment. Have you received the personal touch from Jesus the healing Saviour? He invites you to do so as He says: “*Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light*." (Matthew 11:28-30). The people who had witnessed this personal healing heard the previously deaf and mute man speaking plainly and they were ‘*astonished beyond measure*’ (7:37). This brings us to our third point:

1. **The utterly astonished crowd**

Here is a strange truth. Having given the mute man the ability to speak, Jesus tells the people who had brought him to be silent about what had happened. We might say that He instructed them to ‘hold their tongues’. Mark records these words of Christ: “*And Jesus charged them to tell no one. But the more he charged them, the more zealously they proclaimed it*” (v36). Why did Jesus strongly command them to be silent about what He had done?

Remember that earlier in Mark’s gospel Jesus spoke these words to a leper who He had healed: "*See that you say nothing to anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, for a proof to them*." (Mark 1:44). In that instance, the cleansed leper went out and ‘*spread the news, so that Jesus could no longer openly enter a town, but was out in desolate places, and people were coming to him from every quarter*’ (v45). The effect of people witnessing to the power and authority of Jesus to heal was that His movement and public preaching ministry were increasingly hindered by large crowds. He was not even able to rest in a remote place for a while because the multitudes followed Him (e.g. Mark 6:30-33).

As news about Him spread, criticism and opposition from the religious elite also increased (e.g. Mark 7:1-2). In this same region of the ten cities, previously Jesus had instructed the healed maniac who had been delivered from demon possession to "*Go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you*." (5:19)? Now, back in this Gentile territory, some time had passed, and the word had gone out about him. The threat from His enemies had increased.

Many people were looking to him as a ‘miracle worker’. The time for Him to travel to Jerusalem to lay down His life had not yet come. Jesus was always in control of His own destiny. As the day of His crucifixion approached, He placed more emphasis on the spiritual, redemptive significance of His mission. For example “*the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many*” (Mark 10:45).

The utterly astonished crowd listened to His words with physically functional ears, but they would notobey His call for them to remain silent about what He had done. The more fervently Jesus charged them to be silent, the more zealously they proclaimed what had happened. The crowd were likely Christ-admirers at this time, not faithfully committed people who had ears to hear His wise command. Their response in doing the exact opposite of what Jesus commanded reveals something of the perversity of human nature. Instead of keeping their tongues still about what Jesus had done they ‘zealously proclaimed’ it.

People like you and I can be similarly perverse. When we are told not to do something there is often an impulse to do exact that which has been prohibited or when we are instructed not to do something, that is the very thing we desire. ‘*Don’t eat anything from that open packet of chocolate biscuits in the kitchen cupboard!*’. 19th century American author Mark Twain once wisely said ‘*the more things are forbidden, the more popular they become*’.

Jesus said, “*You are my friends if you do what I command you*” (John 15:14), and: "*If you love me, you will keep my commandments*” (John 14:15). Unlike the period leading up to His death when Jesus commanded people to remain silent at times, after His resurrection He instructed His disciples to speak openly about what they had heard and seen about Him. For example in Acts 1:8 “*You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth*”. In Matthew 28:19-20 “*Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you*”.

Brothers and sisters, spiritually, the Lord opens our ears to hear and to believe the gospel. He gives us the words of life to speak to others, so that they may be utterly astonished by what Jesus has done by coming to earth as a man, dying in the place of others who deserve death for their sins and living a perfect life on our behalf. "*He who has ears to hear, let him hear*" (Mark 4:9).

AMEN.