

Pentecost 15B
September 20, 2009
Hymns: 399 - 520 - 235 - 238

MARK 7:31-37
EVERYBODY'S TALKING ABOUT JESUS!
***Talking About His Competence.**
***Talking About His Compassion.**
***Talking About His Salvation.**

O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare Your praise! Amen.

Dear worshippers, blessed to hear God's Word,

(slide 1) Many of us suffer a gradual decline in hearing ability as we age. Some tones that are clear to young people may not be heard by people who are older like me. I drive my "much younger" wife crazy when I don't respond to my wristwatch alarm going off. When we sit long at intersections waiting for the light to turn so we can go left, she always tells me to turn off that stupid blinker noise. People like me prompted a security firm to develop a device called the Mosquito. The Mosquito emits a high-pitched tone that older adults cannot hear, but which is said to be "earsplittingly painful" to young people. The intended use for this device is to play it in places like Mall of America where older folks do not want younger people to gather. Thus the older set will not have to be bothered by the disconcerting habits, clothing styles, and music of the second group.

However, youth has found a way to get even. There is now a high-pitched cell-phone ring tone that most people over a certain age cannot hear. This enables, for instance, students sitting in a classroom to receive cell phone calls unbeknown to that older teacher. So, the student can be getting text messages that may range anywhere from idle chatter to answers to the questions on the exam the student is taking at the time.

We can laugh about the hearing loss that comes with aging. It is problem that will affect most of us sooner or later. In fact, experts predict that years of rock music, leaf blowers, power snow blowers and lawn mowers, and noise pollution in general will result in millions of baby boomers with hearing loss. According to a recent study by the National Institutes of Health, there has been a stunning 26 percent increase in those suffering permanent hearing loss between the ages of 35 and 60, compared to 15 years earlier. Hearing loss is becoming quite widespread and is a personal nuisance to many. But there is nothing funny about deafness. The world of non-hearing people can be lonely and difficult. **(slide 2)** Some of you may be surprised to learn that Beethoven died a broken and bitter man. Deaf in later years, he struggled to conduct an orchestra playing one of his own beautiful compositions. Once after giving a piano recital, he bent over the keyboard, oblivious to the applause that thundered about him.

You and I who have our hearing, have our vision, who are able to get around with a minimum of impediments, ought to thank God every day, and we ought to salute those who overcome obstacles that we cannot even imagine. Did you know, by the way, that the three most popular languages in the United States are English, Spanish, and American Sign Language? There are more non-hearing people in our land than you might imagine.

It is clear that Jesus' primary mission was not healing the sick and the disabled. He spent an enormous part of His ministry doing just that, but that was not His primary mission. He came to save mankind from their sins. During three years of ministry He prepared His apostles and others to be post-Pentecost witnesses for a booming Kingdom of God in the hearts of people around the world. As Jesus went from city to city, town to town, and village to village - His primary mission was to announce the coming of God's Kingdom, and to lay the foundation for the New Testament Church.

Still, there was no hiding the former carpenter's healing power! Everybody was talking about His competence to heal! The deaf, the lame, the blind....the sick and demon-possessed all found healing at His hand. And why not?! Jesus was God in a human body. John opens his gospel identifying Jesus as the Creator God: ***Through Him all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made.*** If Jesus made you, me, and every other human, He surely can heal us. If He by His omniscience and omnipotence empowered our bodies in all their organs' functions, He can surely make corrections in our bodies when anything goes haywire.

But we don't always talk up Jesus' healing power as we ought. Those common people of Jesus' day, even while clueless as to Him being the Christ, talked incessantly about His healing power. They came great

distances, at great effort, to bring their physically distressed loved ones to Jesus. In so doing they put to shame you and me who know so much more about Jesus and still fail to bring our loved ones to Jesus in prayer. We put our trust in doctors and drugs to make us well. God has truly blessed us with modern medicine, but not that we should leave Him out of the formula for physical repair and bodily maintenance. Jesus is deserving of our prayers and praises for everything He does for our bodies as well as for our souls.

So, look to Jesus, fellow Christian, whenever physical problems assail you and your loved ones! Know that He works through doctors and medicine. Know that He has the power to go far beyond the power He has placed into the hands of skilled surgeon and into potent drugs. Give Jesus the credit due! He is competent to heal! Let's all of us be talking about Him when that relative, neighbor, friend, business associate or their loved one is stricken. Let them see that you are talking from your heart, when you say that you will earnestly pray for healing. You have a Lord and God Who is competent to heal!

You also have a Savior Who is compassionate. Everybody was talking about how *Jesus did everything well!* He was a man of compassion. People brought their disabled friends and family members to Him for healing, and, of course, He could not turn them away. **(slide 3)** In today's lesson from Mark some people brought a man to Jesus who was deaf and could hardly talk. They begged Jesus to place His hand on the man and heal him. Jesus responded to their request. He took the man aside, away from the crowd. It was never Jesus' intent to make a spectacle of His healing ministry. So-called faith healers today would do well to follow His example. He took the man aside. Then He put His fingers into the man's ears. Then Mark tells us He spit and touched the man's tongue. He looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh Jesus 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.

(slide 4) Christ could not turn away people in need. Whether they were physically disabled, mentally disabled, or spiritually disabled--Christ could not turn them away. His sense of compassion was accorded to all. That's good that He would not turn anyone away, because that means He will also take time for you and me. After all, there will be times when you and I will be in a distressing situation, and we will want to know that Christ has time for us. Satan will remind us that we are undeserving of His care and healing. And he would be right! But fortunately, Jesus is compassionate toward all. And you, Jesus' brother...Jesus' sister through faith, should know that He will always be there for you. He has promised to be with you to the end of the age. He is there for you in all your troubles, cares, and calamities. Trust Him! Tell yourself, tell anyone who will listen: *He has done all things well! My Savior is competent to heal and compassionate. He will do what is absolutely best for me and for His Kingdom, because that is what He does!*

There will come times when all of us will push hard on God's intercom button, if not in our own behalf, certainly in behalf of someone we love. At that moment we will be thankful that we see unlimited compassion in Christ. For there will come times when we will rely on Christ's compassion. Jesus' works of healing should be the least controversial part of His ministry. **(slide 5)** Of course, He could heal and He still heals today. Sometimes He heals bodies, sometimes He heals marriages, sometimes He heals broken hearts--but He does heal. If you have a need of any kind, bring it to Jesus. He is compassionate. He is completely competent. He may not always heal in just the way we want, but, if we let Him, He will heal. He is compassionate. He is competent.

Finally, we hear Christ's call. **(slide 6)** He commissions us to a ministry of compassion as well. This is why there are so many hospitals worldwide with Christian names. This is why there are so many Christian homes for children who have been abandoned or abused. This is why there are so many Christian relief agencies. We continue Christ's ministry of compassion. Did you know that during the Middle Ages, Benedictine monks so identified with deaf people that they created a new definition of deafness that still shapes public perceptions in the twenty-first century? The monks lived in monasteries and took a vow of silence. Having developed their own nonverbal forms of interaction, they knew that significant daily human communication was possible without speech. This was during a time when the church in general shared society's prejudice against the deaf, and routinely barred deaf people from receiving Holy Communion simply because they could not "confess aloud" their faith. Spanish Benedictine monk Pedro Ponce de Leon, the first teacher of the deaf, so identified with deaf people that he developed a sign language and wrote a book on the topic of how to teach the "mute deaf." Ponce de Leon's ideas were eventually exported to France and later to North America, perhaps changing deaf education forever. Millions of people who have hearing and speech impairments are no longer treated as if they were subhuman. This is but one example of Christ's compassion lived out through His followers.

Christ is calling us, as His people today, to reach out to in the same way that the Benedictines reached out to the deaf. We follow a compassionate Christ Who never turned anyone away. He healed everyone who called to Him for help. And He calls us today to continue His ministry to the least, the lowliest and the lost--whoever they may be. Beginning right here at church, He is calling you to reach out to those who may speak differently than you do, or who may be hard for you to understand – not because they are mute but because their speech and tongue are somewhat different than your own. Jesus calls us to work on understanding them by making conversation with them – as difficult as it may be at times. As you show Jesus' compassion for them, you will surprise yourself at how your competence will grow!

Today Christianity – Our Christianity, your Christianity and my Christianity - has an image problem. Christians are supposed to represent Christ to the world. But according to the latest Barna Group report card, something has gone terribly wrong. Using descriptions like “hypocritical,” “insensitive,” and “judgmental,” young Americans share an impression of Christians that's nothing short of . . . well, unChristian. We need to make every effort to show Christ's compassion for the physical AND spiritual welfare of others.

Jesus commanded the man's friends not to tell anyone about this miracle. He knew that as word got around about His healing power, He wouldn't have time for anything else. The need was so great. For you see Jesus didn't come to build health clinics; His ministry was to build the foundation for His Church. His compassion for others was so great that He could not turn aside those who were distressed, but He needed time for His primary mission. So He asked those who brought the non-hearing man to Him not to tell anyone. That was a simple instruction. Don't tell anyone what happened here. But Mark tells us that the more He told them not to tell, the more they kept talking about it. After all, people were overwhelmed with amazement. “He has done everything well,” they said. “He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak.”

Friends, the time has long passed for us to remain silent. **(slide 7)** Tell all! Tell everyone and anyone who will listen about Christ's divine compassion for mankind that led Him to leave His throne in heaven and come down to walk this earth all the way to the cross for our sins. Tell of Jesus' competence to be our Savior: He was IXTUS! – Jesus of Nazareth, a real human being; the Christ, the Messiah promised of old; God's Son and indeed the Savior of all the world! Let every Christian now talk about Jesus. In the words of the people of our text, how much more you and I know and comprehend that: ***He has done EVERYTHING well!*** Amen.

Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever!
Amen!