



ST. STEPHEN'S ANGLICAN CHURCH

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The Twelfth Sunday after Trinity, Sunday August 18, 2013

THE BLIND AND DEAF MAN

The passage selected for the Sermon this morning is taken from the Gospel:

“And they bring unto him one that was deaf, and had an impediment in his speech, and they beseeched Him to put His hand on Him. And He took him aside from the multitude, and put His fingers into his ears, and He spit, and touched his tongue, and looking up to heaven He sighed, and said “Ephphatha” that is “Be opened”.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son and the Holy Ghost. Amen.

It is an undeniable fact of history that at the intersection of Christianity and prosperity, Christianity becomes unbalanced toward intellectualism and false spirituality. False spirituality is a spirituality that denies the importance of the mundane and physical aspects of our lives, allowing us to believe we can be holy without a concern for what we do in our bodies. In its extreme form, this tendency becomes the ancient heresy of gnosticism, which postulates that we are prisoners in our bodies, and all we have to do is learn to ignore the body, overcome it with mind and will, and that we can elevate ourselves to god-like status. Essentially, much New Age and pseudo-Eastern philosophy is re-hashed gnosticism.

In fact though, Christianity is about offering body, as well as mind and soul. There was nothing genteel about dying on the Cross, and even in His glorified post-Resurrection body, the

scars of Jesus' real pain and injury were present as the witness to bodily element of His sacrifice. The scars from His sacrifice in His body are the emblems of His Holiness and the identification he offers the Apostles to assure us of His identity. The image in today's Gospel is another reminder that Christianity is an earthly and earthy religion, and that the most mundane and even seemingly repulsive aspects of our life are to be offered up in union with Jesus Christ, our high priest.

Let's refresh our mind's picture from the Gospel. A multitude has surrounded Jesus, as He returns from Tyre and Sidon. They bring him a man who is deaf and dumb, and they ask for him to be healed. In other miracles, Jesus merely speaks the word, and demons flee, leprosy falls away or sight is restored. This time however, He does something remarkable. He puts His fingers in the ears of the man to heal his deafness, and then Jesus spits, and puts His spit in the mouth of the

man to cure his speech impediment. Not a very genteel picture, but a very deliberate one.

Whenever Jesus confronts an infirmity of perception, such as hearing or sight, He is making a statement about our ability to recognize Him as the Son of God and our Lord and Savior. Failure to recognize Jesus is the sin of the Jews. Failure to recognize Jesus as God and Savior is also the temptation of modern Christianity.

God makes His presence and power known to His creation by speech. He spoke in Genesis, and the world was created. He walked with Adam in the cool of the evening and spoke to Him. He spoke to Cain. He spoke to Noah. He spoke to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Moses. As He led the Jews from Egypt, He spoke to the whole of the people in the cloud and from the mountain. The whole of the Old Testament is God talking to Man, and Man refusing to listen.

In the New Testament, God becomes incarnate and He speaks to us in our human tongue. He teaches us that He not only speaks the Word of God, but that He is the very Word of God made flesh. After He ascends to heaven, telling us to prepare for his return, He sends His Holy Spirit, and the first miracle of the Apostles as they are filled with the Spirit is to speak to all men in all tongues.

It is nonsense to believe that a God who has revealed Himself in the Word, and as The Word, has suddenly stopped talking to us. He speaks to us constantly. But we have become deaf. Our deafness is not a deformity of ears, but the deafness that comes from over exposure to noise. We no longer hear God talking to us because our ears are full of the noise of the world, which brings us care and worry and fear and pettiness. The worry that fills us with concern for everything but the thing that matters, loving our Lord God with all our hearts and minds and souls, and our neighbors as ourselves. The action Jesus takes to cure this man of deafness is a simple straight-forward act. He puts his fingers in the man's ears, the way we would put fingers in our own ears, to block out the noise, and to retune the ears to the still quiet sound of God's voice.

Then, when the man can hear, He spits on His hand and touches the spit to the man's tongue. To coin a term from the kids, this seems gross, coarse, repugnant. Why does Jesus, who can heal the Centurion's daughter from miles away, have to touch this man in such a disturbing way. Again the answer is simple. Jesus gives us what is exclusively His, so that we can share in His grace and His salvation.

Remember, Jesus is the Word of God made flesh. He speaks the Word of God, knowledge of His Father, and the promise of the Holy Ghost. You can not make a word in your mouth without spit. A dry mouth is a wordless mouth. The mouth of the deaf man, the mouth of each us before we were baptized into grace, was a dry and wordless mouth. We can't speak the heavenly words, speak the Name of God in the way it was intended unless Godly spit, that allows us to form Godly words, is in our mouths. Jesus gives this man the means to speak in a Godly manner, and immediately, the string of his tongue is loosed, and he speaks plainly, praising God. The multitude follows suit and can't be silenced. They ring out in praise and thanks to God.

In a few minutes, we have the opportunity to share in this miracle. We are called to the rail to receive the Body and Blood of Christ. In preparation we need to cover our ears to the noise of the world, so that we can hear the particular word our Lord has for us. Then by receipt of His Body and Blood, we too will have grace to form the Godly Words we were created to pronounce. The string of our tongue can be untied, and like the deaf and dumb man, we will be healed. This morning, we should leave the altar rail speaking plainly, speaking words of praise and thanksgiving by the grace of our shared life, body and soul, in the life of Christ.

✠ In The Name of The Father and of The Son and of The Holy Ghost. Amen. ✠