Mark Lesson 23 (2022)

**JESUS HEALS A DEAF AND MUTE MAN**

(*Subtitle: “He has done everything well”*)

Mark 7:31-37

Key Verse: 7:37

“People were overwhelmed with amazement. ‘He has done everything well,’ they said. ‘He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak.’”

 Today’s episode of Jesus’ healing of a man with a hard of hearing and speech impediment is recorded only in Mark’s Gospel. We wonder why Mark included this specific event out of so many miracles Jesus had done. Since Mark didn’t specify the reason, we can only speculate prayerfully, hoping to be led by the Spirit of Christ Jesus. We also notice that people’s remark on this miracle is significant. They were amazed and said, “He has done everything well. He even makes the deaf fear and the mute speak.” **“He has done everything well!”** Was it an overstatement? Maybe. How can any man do everything well or perfectly? Well, these people probably didn’t realize that what they commented on Jesus described precisely who he was, Jesus the Son of the living God. This morning let’s try to be attentive to what the Lord is speaking to us through this text.

 Look at verse 31. “Then Jesus left the vicinity of Tyre and went through Sidon, down to the Sea of Galilee and into the region of the Decapolis.” Last week, we learned about Jesus leaving the borders of Israel and traveling to the vicinity of Tyre, which is modern-day Lebanon, where he healed the Syrophoenician woman’s daughter from demon possession. Now, we see Jesus was on the move. Verse 31 is the description of Jesus’ itinerary that is puzzling. After leaving the Vicinity of Tyre, he ended up going to Decapolis. Yet, he didn’t take a shortcut. Instead, he wandered around here and there (Map#1). First, he went through Sidon, which was 20 miles north of the city of Tyre. We don’t know how long he stayed around Sidon. Then he turned around and went down to the Sea of Galilee and into the region of the Decapolis. It was a long journey, which took more than 120 miles. Some scholars think that this journey lasted several months.

Why was he wandering around with his disciples for such a long time? Was he sightseeing or exploring the mystery of nature and culture? Well, that too. But my best guess is that Jesus wanted to spend time exclusively with his disciples so that he could build an intimate personal relationship with each of them while giving them instructions for their future ministry. His disciples needed to be away from distractions to be nurtured and educated. It was an intensive walking seminar. (Pic-1)

The area Jesus traveled with his disciples was non-Jewish vicinities under Greek culture. People who resided in Decapolis were predominantly non-Jewish, although some Jews had lived there. However, it was a highly civilized area where they worshipped Greek gods and goddesses. (Pics-2,3,4) Orthodox Jews, particularly the Pharisees, would not want to associate with sinful pagan culture and unclean people. Can you imagine Jesus and his disciples walking through the pagan cities where they saw many idols and naked sculptures? I wonder what went through their minds while they were there.

Now, what happened there? Look at verse 32. “There some people brought to him a man who was deaf and could hardly talk, and they begged Jesus to place his hand on him.” According to Matthew’s account, when Jesus arrived in the region, people brought many sick people, such as the lame, blind, and crippled, including mute speaking. And Jesus healed them all (Mt. 15:29-31). But Mark records only one person, who was deaf and could hardly talk. We are not sure whether his deafness was congenital or accidental. Probably he wasn’t born deaf. Yet, maybe along the way, he had a head injury or infection that caused his hard of hearing. Yet, it’s all our speculation.

If this man couldn’t hear from his childhood, he could hardly develop talking skills. When we cannot hear, we cannot develop talking abilities because we learn how to speak words and sentences primarily from hearing. He was able to see but not able to communicate with anybody. Even though he might have learned sign language, his communication level was inferior and shallow. His activity was limited, and the level of his life satisfaction was poor at best. There was also a social stigma of being deaf and mute. We can imagine this man’s life was misery itself. In any culture, Jewish and non-Jewish, this man could be considered a most unfortunate person if not considered cursed by God.

However, the people who brought this man to Jesus had sympathy or empathy for him. They wanted Jesus to bless this man by putting his hand on him. We are sure they had known Jesus beforehand (3:8), primarily through the Gerasene demoniac, whom Jesus healed from the legion of demons (5:1-20). The friends of this man were good friends. How lucky it is to have a friend who brings Jesus into our lives.

What did Jesus do for the man who was deaf and mute? Look at verse 33a. “He took him aside, away from the crowd.” Why did Jesus take him aside? It’s because he wanted to pay full and undivided attention to him. It shows Jesus’ deep compassion and love for this individual as a precious child of God, not just one of many sick people. I believe Jesus looked at the man face to face, and there was an eye-contact between Jesus and this man. When we talk with our loved ones, we make an eye-contact (Pic#5). Eye contact is powerful non-verbal communication and the language of love. Humanly speaking, it was eye contact between a Jew and a Gentile. Spiritually speaking, it was eye contact between God and man. That’s a point of connection. I believe that the healing had already started as Jesus and this man saw each other face to face and eye to eye.

That’s not all. When we read verses 33-34, we notice that before healing or as a healing process, Jesus tried to **communicate** with the man as best as he could through sign language. ***“Communicate!”*** Look at verses 33 and 34. “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!’).” Jesus used four signs. It shows that Jesus didn’t see the man as demon-possessed simply because he was disabled.

 First, Jesus put his fingers into his ears, both ears. What was he doing? Well, Jesus was identifying for the man what he knew about his problem, his problem of deafness. He also wanted this man to see that he knew his pain and that he was about to heal. Secondly, after spitting, Jesus touched the man’s tongue.Jesus was saying to the man that he had a speech problem and would fix it. It was just a genuine gesture of communication.

In verse 34, Jesus looked up to heaven. This is his third sign language. Why did he look up to heaven? He was saying to the man, *“What is about to happen to you comes from heaven.”* Jesus didn’t want to draw attention to himself. He wanted the man to know that healing comes from heaven. Finally, Jesus looked up to heaven with a deep sigh. What does a deep sigh indicate? It’s an expression of pain over the man’s suffering and an expression of compassion, tenderness, and intense emotion. Jesus groaned over man’s suffering. It may even be considered Jesus’ prayer. It reminds us of Romans 8:26, “In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans.” After communicating with this man with sign language, Jesus then healed the man by saying to the man, “**Ephphatha!”** (Which means “**Be opened!”**

Of course, the man could not hear what he said. But it didn’t matter because Jesus could have healed the man simply by saying, “Be opened!” But we should pay attention to the fact that Jesus tried hard to communicate with this man as best as possible. It reveals a vital spiritual lesson, which can also apply to us, the importance of communication.

 Even though we are not deaf or mute physically like this man, we do have communication problems with each other. The problem most of us have is like this man’s problem. We are not able to hear and express ourselves in the way we want to. Why? It’s because of a lack of communication, poor communication, and miscommunication. Communication problem is rampant in every relationship, including couple’s relationships, parents and children, siblings, friends, coworkers, employment relationships, political parties, different nations, etc. People don’t like to listen but want to talk first, trying to get their point across. The result is that communication is impaired, and the problem gets worse.

Poor communication, lack of communication, or miscommunication is not just a problem between people. It’s a problem between God and his people. The people of Israel ignored what God was telling them. As a result, they misunderstood God’s intent and didn’t turn out to be a blessing to the world. It’s so sad and embarrassing.

How about Jesus’ disciples? Were they any better? Maybe a little bit better, but not much at this point. They also had the same problem. I think what Jesus was trying to teach his disciples through this event is the healing of our communication between people and between God and us. Jesus often emphasized the importance of listening by saying to them, “Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear.” (Mk. 4:9, 23, Mt. 11:5) or “Consider carefully what you hear!” (4:24). He even quoted from the Scripture, “They may be ever seeing but never perceiving, and ever hearing but never understanding; otherwise they might turn and be forgiven.” (Mk. 4:12; Isaiah 6;9,10) In these verses, Jesus mainly emphasizes the importance of listening, not talking. We need to open our ears, listening ears. Listening is not easy; it requires patience, humility, and healthy curiosity. We have so many conflicted relationships. But it’s mostly a communication problem due to a lack of listening and poor listening skills. If we can and willing to listen to each other, no problem cannot be solved.

Prayer is the primary way God’s children communicate with God the Father. So, prayer should not just let God Father know what we want and need. It should be two-way communication, listening and talking, trusting in his love, power, and sovereignty. Many people feel stuck in their troubles, not knowing what to do. They say that their prayers are not answered. Is that true? Maybe not. We must ask ourselves, *“Am I ready or willing to listen to God my Father, or do I want God to listen to me and do what I want?”* To trust in God’s love and power is not enough. We need to trust in God’s sovereignty and his providence. Recently, I was inspired by what St. Mother Theresa said about prayer. She said, *“I used to believe that prayer changes things, but now I know that prayer changes us, and we change things.”* (Pic#6) It’s such a profound truth. Jesus’ prayer was always to submit to the will of God the Father, “Not my will but yours be done.”

Look at verses 35-36. “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.” The man’s deaf and mute problem was wholly cured almost instantly. Yet, Jesus commanded people, including this man, not to talk about this to anybody. We wonder why.

Jesus probably didn’t want people to think he was merely a miracle worker. The good news of God’s kingdom through Jesus is not complete until his sacrificial death for our sins and his resurrection. The death and resurrection of Christ are the core of the gospel. Through his death on the cross, all our sins are paid for. Through his sacrificial death, we are forgiven. He was wounded and crushed in our place so we may be healed. And through his death and resurrection, the gate of heaven is open for us. Anyone who trusts can experience the healing from heaven and the indwelling of God’s presence in their day-to-day lives and beyond.

 Look at verse 37. “People were overwhelmed with amazement. ‘He has done everything well,’ they said. ‘He even makes the deaf hear, and the mute speak.’” They said, “He has done everything well.” I think it’s more than saying, *“Good job, Jesus!”* In Matthew’s account, people praise the God of Israel. (Mt. 15:31) These people were not Jews or even Christians. They were pagans who worshiped pagan gods and idols. But what they saw in and through Jesus was the unique revelation of God, who deeply cares and heals. And they praised the God of Israel, the Only true God, whom the Jews believed.

 Let me close my sermon. If my faith in Jesus does not restore me from my brokenness and pains and make me whole, I don’t think I can continue my faith journey. The truth is that Christ Jesus makes me whole. He does everything well. Even though our life is full of pains, wounds, and troubles, those things have no final authority on our souls. Christ Jesus makes everything well. *“Goodness is stronger than evil. Love is stranger than hate. Light is stronger than darkness. Life is stronger than death. Victory is ours through him who loves us.”* (Archbishop Desmond Tutu) I want us to read Philippians 1:6, “Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.” When Jesus comes again, he will restore all his children and raise them as beautiful and glorious as we can ever imagine. This is our hope in the Messiah, the Son of the living God.

 We may be finally at the end of the pandemic, but we are not sure when the war in Ukraine will end. There is growing concern and threat by global warming, political chaos, violence and atrocities in many nations, and sky-rocketing living cost globally. Things around us are alarming. Despite the challenges each of us faces, most of us feel compelled to do something for many suffering people nearby. Yes, let’s show our solidarity and do good things, especially during the upcoming holiday season. After all, we need to acknowledge that we are not in control over many things. Yet, we must remember that happiness depends on our attitude. Let us trust not just in God’s love and power but also in his absolute sovereignty and providence. Let us also try to listen to God our Father and others a little more than we used to. God is all in all. When we trust in his absolute sovereignty, the level of our joy and serenity will increase, and we may be able to say, **“He has done everything well.”**