

The Twelfth Sunday after Trinity – Pr. Faugstad sermon  
St. Mark 7:31-37: “Jesus Answers Our Groans with Grace.”  
August 21/22, 2021 | Saude, Jerico, & Redeemer Lutheran Churches

**In Nomine Iesu**

+ + +

Lord Jesus, open our ears to hear Your voice and our eyes to see Your power. Heal us, Lord, and teach us to lay our weaknesses and sicknesses on You, just as You took them and carried them. Drive the evil spirits from our hearts and our homes, and give us grace to serve You and Your people, to follow You and to bear one another’s burdens. Amen. (*Book of Family Prayer*, pp. 537-538)

*Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. (Rom. 1:7, etc.)*

---

*The sermon text for today is taken from the seventh chapter of the Gospel according to St. Mark. We read selected verses in Jesus’ name:*

Then [Jesus] returned from the region of Tyre and went through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis. And they brought to Him a man who was deaf and had a speech impediment, and they begged Him to lay His hand on him. / And taking him aside from the crowd privately, He put his fingers into his ears, and after spitting touched his tongue. And looking up to heaven, He sighed and said to him, “Ephphatha,” that is, “Be opened.” And his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. / And Jesus charged them to tell no one. But the more He charged them, the more zealously they proclaimed it. And they were astonished beyond measure, saying, “He has done all things well. He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak.” (ESV)

---

*These are Your words, heavenly Father. Sanctify us by Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen. (Joh. 17:17)*

In Christ Jesus, who came to heal every wound and right every wrong, dear fellow redeemed:

About a week ago, I went to every door in our house one after the other, and I opened and closed them multiple times. No one thought it was strange. Why? Because I was fixing noisy hinges. Some of the doors groaned just about the entire span of their swing, but thankfully now they don’t make a sound. We need the newborn to sleep!

Old hinges are not the only source of groaning in the house, and I suspect the same is true or has been true for your home. There are groans when jobs are handed out and groans when mean parents say “no” to certain requests. Sometimes groans will also accompany the effort of getting out of a chair at the end of a long day.

There are still other reasons that we groan. St. Paul writes that “*the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies*” (Rom. 8:22-23). The presence of sin in the world and in ourselves causes difficulties for us. One of those difficulties is physical trouble. We experience sickness, disease, injury, disability, pain.

In the Gospels, we find numerous references of Jesus healing people with such conditions. We meet one of them in today's reading, *"a man who was deaf and had a speech impediment."* Those two conditions naturally go together. If he could not hear, he would not know how to correctly form sounds and words.

But the man could groan, and I'm sure he did. He could see how much was closed to him in his world of silence. He must have wondered why it had to be him. He saw everyone around him enjoying the normal operations of their ears and tongue. He thought about how much good he could accomplish if only he could hear and speak. But there was nothing he or his friends could do about it. It was his cross to bear.

We can't say why certain things happen to certain individuals. We have all known scoundrels who seem perfectly healthy, and we have also known kind and wonderful people who endure constant pain. This makes no sense to us. We want to have a logical explanation for why some people seem to suffer more than others. We think it would be right if bad people should experience more trouble.

Jesus' disciples thought the same way. When they passed by a man who had been blind his entire life, they asked Jesus, *"Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"* And Jesus said, *"It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him"* (Joh. 9:2,3). Jesus' answer shows us that God has higher purposes for the crosses we bear than we often perceive.

If you are one who is afflicted with something that brings you significant pain or trouble, there is comfort in Jesus' words. Your pain is not a sign of His anger or His abandonment. He has not sent it to harm you or to push you away from Him. He has allowed it in His wisdom and according to His good plan. He intends to work through it for your good and for the good of others. And if He has a purpose for your suffering, that means He has a purpose for you.

The deaf man had purpose too. He was not a mistake. He was not a lesser person in God's eyes. Whether or not he had been healed, God loved him. God the Father sent His only Son to suffer and die for this man's salvation. That was the man's greatest need, just as it is our greatest need. But God also knows our lesser needs, and many times He brings us relief and healing from the things that burden us.

In the account from today's Gospel, Jesus in His mercy chose to bring physical healing to the man. First He took him aside from the crowd. This wasn't for the sake of modesty or humility. He wanted to keep the people from being distracted by the miracles. He wanted them to understand the primary reason for His coming—not for miracles, but for their salvation. He was the Messiah. That's the reason He had power to heal. He was God in the flesh, who had come to redeem the world of sinners.

Because He was God in the flesh, His touch had healing power. His flesh is life-giving flesh. He pressed those life-giving fingers into the man's deadened ears. He put life-giving saliva on the man's imprisoned tongue. He spoke a life-giving Word into that world of dead silence. But

before Jesus spoke, He sighed. Or rather, He groaned. He groaned toward heaven. This groan was a prayer to His Father, expressing the trouble of this man and the troubles of all sinners.

Jesus willingly took that trouble on Himself. He felt every pain, every sorrow, every hurt. Healing went out from Him, while He stored up every affliction. Jesus was a Magnet that drew all our sin and all the effects of our sin to Himself. This is why He groaned toward heaven and why He would groan in agony in the Garden and on the cross.

His groaning was for you. He made your groans His own. Whatever has caused you pain or sorrow or weakness, whatever has made you cry out for mercy and brought you to your knees, He took that to Himself. He put in on His shoulders. His shoulders are stronger than yours or anyone else's. His can carry the load. "Surely," says the prophet Isaiah – "Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows" (Isa. 53:4).

Jesus went to the cross, weighed down, carrying all those things for you. Your groaning and the groaning of all the fallen in the history of the world hung in His ears. And it pushed Him forward. He went to the cross to free you from everything that drags you down in this life. He went there to provide the answer for every groan. That answer is His grace.

Grace is what we find in Jesus. "Be opened," He said to the deaf man, and "his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly." In his first condition, the man could neither hear nor speak. Now he heard plainly and spoke rightly. Before Jesus came to us with grace, our hearts were hardened and our ears were unhearing. "Be opened," He said through His powerful Word. And our ears were opened, our tongues were released, and we could speak rightly. We could speak the truth – the truth about ourselves and the truth about God and His salvation.

We can speak rightly, but we don't always do it. Sometimes we don't think that God has things quite right in His Word. We think that leniency or compromise are called for, when He says, "Stand firm!" According to the Preacher in Ecclesiastes, there is "a time to keep silence, and a time to speak" (3:7). But we often get those things backwards.

That's what the people in the crowd did. Jesus charged them not to tell anyone about the deaf man's healing. But we're told "the more He charged them, the more zealously they proclaimed it." We almost feel proud of the people. Even Jesus couldn't stop them from telling the marvelous truth about the amazing thing He had done!

But Jesus didn't tell them to stay quiet with a smile and a wink. The people were telling the truth about Him, but they were spreading a less important truth. They weren't telling people about Jesus the Messiah, Jesus the Savior. They were telling people about Jesus the Miracle Man. This distracted from the primary work Jesus came to do. The crowds around Him may have often been very large, but we find that very few were looking for eternal salvation.

We want to look to Jesus for the right thing. We don't hinge our faith on whether or not He fixes our earthly pains and troubles. We don't conclude that if He allows us to suffer, He must not love us. We cling to Him – and even more tightly – while we suffer. We trust that He will be with us in our anguish because He says He will be.

He promises to reach out and meet us in our pain with the healing touch of His Word and Sacraments. He comes through these means to provide spiritual relief and strength and to help us stay focused on Him. We may not feel His fingers in our ears or on our tongue as the deaf man did. But we partake of the same life-giving flesh when we eat Jesus' holy body and drink His precious blood in the Supper.

When Jesus comes to heal, He also brings with Him the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit comforts us and increases our faith in the midst of our suffering. And He expresses to the heavenly Father those things we can't find the words for. St. Paul says that *"the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words"* (Rom. 8:26). Not only did Jesus groan for us – so does the Holy Spirit.

It is clear we have a God who loves us. He knows our troubles, and He urges us to set those troubles before Him. He does not promise to grant us everything we ask for just the way we want it. He does not promise us a life without trouble on earth. But He does promise us His grace. When His grace fills our ears through the hearing of His Word, His healing medicine flows through our body and soul. Then our tongues find their release, and we speak rightly, clearly, loudly of our gracious Savior and Lord, who has *"done all things well."*

*Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen.*

+ + +