

*Then Jesus left the vicinity of Tyre and went through Sidon, down to the Sea of Galilee and into the region of the Decapolis. <sup>32</sup> There some people brought to him a man who was deaf and could hardly talk, and they begged him to place his hand on the man.*

*<sup>33</sup> 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. <sup>34</sup> He looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him, "Ephphatha!" (which means, "Be opened!"). <sup>35</sup> At this, the man's ears were opened, his tongue was loosened and he began to speak plainly.*

*<sup>36</sup> Jesus commanded them not to tell anyone. But the more he did so, the more they kept talking about it. <sup>37</sup> People were overwhelmed with amazement. "He has done everything well," they said. "He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak." (Mark 7:31-37)*

### **Jesus Does All Things Well**

What are you good at? Are you an athlete? A scholar? A musician? Do you know anyone who's good at all those things? Most of us aren't. We have strengths and weaknesses. There are probably some aspects of your job or of your school work that you do really well, but others that you don't. Someone might be a great preschool teacher. They do an amazing job of showing affection to the kids and reaching them and leading them to grow in many different areas. But how often would someone with that particular skillset be a really good administrator? It happens, of course. But I suspect that many people who are really good at reaching young children find things like spreadsheets and budgets and scheduling to be uninteresting at the very least. And maybe hard to do well. Or think about parents. What did your parents do really well? What was hard for them? If you are a parent, how will your children answer those questions when they are forty or fifty? It's natural for us to evaluate how well people do in their jobs, in parenting, in all kinds of things. In our gospel lesson for today, we see that the people of Israel had an evaluation of Jesus, too. Whether they understood all the implications of that evaluation, God preserved it to remind us that it still applies. **Jesus does all things well.**

#### **I.**

Our gospel lesson for today records a healing that Jesus did well. The man Jesus healed was deaf and had difficulty talking. The Bible doesn't tell us how he got to be that way, but the fact that he could not speak well may indicate that whatever happened took place when he was very young. Not only did Jesus restore his ability to hear, but he also gave him the ability to speak clearly. And Jesus didn't apply a treatment and wait to see how he did, the way that even modern doctors have to. Jesus didn't do surgery and then let him heal and as the swelling went down, his ability to speak and hear got better. Jesus didn't put him through speech therapy. Jesus simply spoke and the man was healed, instantly. Mark tells us he could speak plainly. When you put all those elements together, clearly Jesus did something only the Son of God could do.

What does that mean for us today? Jesus still has this power. He can do miracles and heal us. Every pastor can tell stories of Christians getting better in ways that seemed like miracles to us. But even when Jesus does not choose to give us an instant healing, the power is still there. God has placed all things in Jesus' hands – that includes our lives and our hurts. So when we go to the doctor and we pray and ask our Lord's blessing on the surgery or the treatment, we are asking the one person who has the power to heal us.

Make no mistake about it, my friends, if you have surgery, if you go through cancer treatments, if you take medication, God decides how successful that is going to be. Doctors do what they can. They rely on their training and experience and what usually works with most people, but always, they do what they can do and then they wait to see what's going to happen. Will you respond to the treatment or won't you? They don't know in advance. Sometimes, they can make a pretty good guess. But only God knows what is actually going to happen with your body and your life. And he decides what is best for you.

That reminds us how important it is for us to place our lives in God's hands. Now, does that mean we shouldn't take medicine or go to doctors? Not at all. God has given us modern medicine, just like he gives us food and shelter. It's part of how he takes care of us on this side of heaven. Just like God could make steaks appear on our dinner tables every night, God could wave his hands and heal our bodies. But he doesn't usually drop steaks on our tables from heaven and he doesn't usually do obvious miracles and instantly heal our bodies.

He works through the doctors and medicines and caregivers he sends us. But he calls us Christians to recognize who is standing behind all those things.

To help us remember that, God has sent me to be your pastor. Some of you know this, but I don't if you all do. If you are in the hospital, it is part of my job to come and visit you. It says that right in the call form that you sent me when you called me to be your pastor. If I know you're in the hospital, I will always do my best to come and see you – even if you're at U of M or up at Beaumont or somewhere else. If I can't come, I'll ask another pastor to visit. If you are going to have surgery, I will gladly come and have a prayer with you before they wheel you away. I will even come if your surgery is scheduled at five or six in the morning. Don't worry about that fact that I'm not a morning person. But you do have to let me know what's happening. Then when we get together, I will remind you that Jesus is watching and your health is in his hands.

Why do I do that? Because God's people cling to their Savior. Jesus doesn't just get us to heaven. He takes care of us here. He rescues and heals us. He decides when we get sick and when we're going to get better. And every choice he makes works to get us to heaven. He lets us get sick to train our faith so that we are prepared to go through death to eternal life. Pastors are part of how he reminds us of his promises. Now, does that mean that you feel better because I'm so good at visitation ministry? Not at all. Many years ago, I was visiting a young man who was in a secure ward in a hospital because he kept trying to harm himself. I was friends with the chaplain at the hospital, who was not a Lutheran. I was troubled because I didn't feel like I was doing this young man much good. I stopped by to talk to the chaplain about it. He said, "I like to think in terms of pastoral presence." His point was that your pastor represents Jesus to you. By being there, I reminded that young man that Jesus was paying attention. That's really what my job is: to visit the sick and remind them that even in suffering, Jesus is doing all things for their good.

That's true even when Jesus does not grant healing and life. Our gospel lesson relates a miracle of healing. But when Jesus was preaching and teaching there were thousands and thousands of people who were sick that he did not heal, at least not with a miracle. Some of them even died. I've spent two and half decades visiting Christians in hospitals. And sometimes, I've gone on to officiate at their funerals. God decides when we get sick and when we get better. God always uses something to bring his children home to heaven. Even if he lets us stay here, but we have to struggle with a chronic, painful condition, God is doing what is best for us. How do we know that's true? Because the same God who decides when we get sick and when we get well sent Jesus to die and take all our sins away. He loved us so much that he asked his Son to lay down his life to pay for us. Jesus loved us so much that he suffered hell itself and then died on the cross to erase our sin and get us into heaven. That love doesn't end when we get sick. God always does what's best for us, even if what's best for us hurts.

God the Father had the power to raise Jesus from the dead. We're not talking about healing someone who was deaf. We're talking about taking a body that died on Friday and early Sunday morning bringing it back to life. Death and sin and sickness and all that's wrong with this world have no power to stop Jesus. If he chooses to heal us, we will be healed, even if every doctor on earth says it's impossible. If he lets us struggle, he knows what he's doing. He is working for the good of our faith. So every time we get sick, every time our life is in danger, every time we ache or hurt, remember: **Jesus does all things well. He conquers our weaknesses.**

## II.

Of course, there's a reason that's true: Jesus is the Son of God. Every miracle that Jesus did reminds us of that fact. In our Old Testament lesson for today, God promised a Savior who would open the eyes of the blind and the ears of the deaf and who would make the lame leap like deer. And how many times don't we see that in the New Testament? Jesus healed again and again to show that he was the promised Messiah, the Savior that God sent to free his people from the power of sin. So it's only appropriate that Jesus healed people because all pain and sorrow and sickness come from sin. When God made Adam and Eve, there were no sick people. If they had not sinned, we wouldn't even need words like "deaf" or "mute" or "crippled." So when Jesus came to save us from our sin, again and again, he undid what sin does to us. What better way could the Savior reveal himself to his people?

Every miracle Jesus did reveals the only one person could be that Savior: Jesus who hid the Son of God in human flesh. We need the revelation from God. If we could have seen Jesus walk this earth, almost certainly we would've been impressed by how he taught and preached and showed love. But we would have still seen

only a man, no matter how special he was. But when Jesus did miracles, he showed that there was much more to him than just another man. He was and is the true Son of God. That's why he rules all things today. That's why he alone could defeat sin and death and the devil for us. The Son of God took on human flesh and walked in our world and suffered what we have to face so that he can lift us up to his world. He came to give us eternal life with him.

Today, we see just how important it was to Jesus that people, individual people, heard that message. Think about this man who couldn't hear or speak clearly. Maybe he could only make grunts. Maybe he tried to speak, but his words were impossible to make out. How could he have even asked Jesus to heal him? What could he have possibly known about Jesus? When his friends and family brought him to Jesus to be healed, Jesus didn't just wave his hand and heal him and then go on. He took the time to communicate with this man.

Even before he did that, Mark shows us how Jesus protected this man's dignity. He took him aside, away from the crowd so he could deal with him one on one without everyone else watching and interfering. Then before he healed him, Jesus put his fingers into this man's ears. He spit and touched his tongue. What was he doing? Sign language. Not the formal language that deaf people have developed today, but more the kind of signing that we hearing people do. We wave to say hello or to call someone over to us. We give a thumb's up to show we're good. If we cut someone off on the road, they may use some sign language to communicate to us that they didn't appreciate that. I think Jesus was trying to communicate to this man and tell him what he was going to do so that he would know his Savior.

Again, what does that mean for us? Jesus wants to communicate with us. He wants us to hear the message of his love. He wants each of us to know he died and rose to forgive us. He wants us to hear the promise of eternal life, and also the promises that he hears us when we pray, that he heals us when we're sick, that he does all things for our good, that he never leaves us or forsakes us. Jesus doesn't just want that preached to the crowds – although he certainly does want that. He wants us to hear it individually – from our pastor when he comes to the hospital or when we sit in his office. From our husbands and fathers when they lead our families in devotions. From our mothers when they talk to us about our Savior's love. From our wives when they encourage us husbands to cling to Jesus. From our brothers and sisters in Christ when they pray for us and listen to our hurts and show the love that Jesus showed us. Jesus wants us to hear all that because he loves us. So he makes it happen. He gives pastors and teachers and congregations and fellow members and Christian homes, all so that we hear that he is God's love come in the flesh. What a tremendous gift! **Jesus does all things well. He shows us who he really is.** Amen.