

SERMON FOR EVENING PRAYER THE TWELFTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITYⁱ

The Reverend Warren E. Shaw, Priest Associate

Lessons:ⁱⁱ

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the eighteenth Verse of the twenty-ninth Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah.ⁱⁱⁱ

“And in that day shall the deaf hear the words of the book, and the eyes of the blind shall see out of obscurity, and out of darkness. The meek also shall increase their joy in the LORD, and the poor among men shall rejoice in the Holy One of Israel. For the terrible one is brought to nought, and the scorner is consumed, and all that watch for iniquity are cut off: That make a man an offender for a word, and lay a snare for him that reproveth in the gate, and turn aside the just for a thing of nought. Therefore thus saith [SETH] the LORD, who redeemed Abraham, concerning the house of Jacob, Jacob shall not now be ashamed, neither shall his face now wax pale. But when he seeth his children, the work of mine hands, in the midst of him, they shall sanctify my name, and sanctify the Holy One of Jacob, and shall fear the God of Israel. They also that erred [URD] in spirit shall come to understanding, and they that murmured shall learn doctrine.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the thirty-first Verse of the seventh Chapter of the Gospel According to St. Mark.^{iv}

“And again, departing from the coasts of Tyre and Sidon, he came unto the sea of Galilee, through the midst of the coasts of Decapolis. And they bring unto him one that was deaf, and had an impediment in his speech; and they beseech him to put his hand upon 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 saith [SETH] unto him, Ephphatha [EFF-uh-thuh],^v that is, Be opened. And straightway his ears were opened, and the string of his tongue was loosed, and he spake plain. And he charged them that they should tell

no man: but the more he charged them, so much the more a great deal they published it; And were beyond measure astonished, saying, He hath done all things well: he maketh both the deaf to hear, and the dumb to speak.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: “And taking him aside from the multitude privately, he put his fingers into his ears, and he spat and touched his tongue; and looking up to heaven, he sighed, and said to him, ‘Ephphatha,’ [EFF-uh-thuh] that is, ‘Be opened.’ And his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly.”^{vi} In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

Homily:

“O Lord, open thou our lips. And our mouth shall show forth thy praise.”^{vii}

We say that every time we read Morning Prayer, and well we should, because unless the Lord opens our mouths, we cannot speak His praise. As St. Paul says, “No one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.”

Not only that, but the Apostle also says, “Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God....” We cannot proclaim the Gospel until we have heard the Gospel, and we cannot proclaim, we cannot hear, the Gospel unless the Lord opens our ears. We may hear the sounds. We may hear the words. But we cannot really hear God speaking to us until Jesus breaths His own breath upon us as He does upon the man in today’s Second Lesson.

We learn to talk by imitating the speech that we hear as children. That is why we speak English instead of some other language. That is also why people who are born deaf have difficulty learning to speak with the normal inflections that other people use when we talk.

People who have not heard the Gospel cannot proclaim the Gospel, because the Gospel is not just something that we can make up out of our imagination. We must hear the word of God in order to speak the word of God, and that, I believe, is why so many people have difficulty talking about the Gospel. If we have not heard it clearly, we cannot proclaim it clearly. We need Jesus to do for us what He did for the man in today's Second Lesson.

This man had a hearing impairment and also a speech impairment. Jesus healed him. How did He do that? Well, let's look at the text.

First Jesus took the man aside, away from the crowd. The crowd is always a distraction, especially for someone who does not hear well. Everybody is talking and gesturing and moving around and it's hard for a deaf man to know where to look or what to look for. By taking the man aside, away from the crowd, Jesus is saying to the man, "Look at me."

That's the most important thing if you want to really hear the Gospel. Focus your attention on Jesus. The Gospel is about Jesus. The whole Bible is about Jesus. Whenever you read the Bible, Old Testament or New, look for Jesus. Whenever you hear the Bible read aloud in church, listen for the voice of Jesus. Jesus is the living Word Who speaks through the written word. Look for Him in every passage of Scripture.

The Bible is full of things that can easily distract you. There are all those genealogies and all those obscure laws and all those different types of literature. There is poetry and history and little contradictions and discrepancies and a strange literary genre called "apocalypse", full of weird images and predictions. There are also people who are eager to explain all of these things and to direct your attention in the process to their own particular agenda or philosophy. But if you really want to hear the Gospel, you have to look past all those distractions and keep Jesus as your focal point.

The second thing that Jesus did to heal this man was put His fingers into the man's ears. I sometimes put my own fingers in my own ears when I want to clean them out. So Jesus was symbolically

removing whatever it was that was keeping this man's ears from working properly.

I have already suggested some external distractions that may interfere with our hearing of the Gospel. Let me now suggest that there are sometimes internal blockages as well: attitudes, prejudices, entrenched notions of right and wrong, feelings of guilt, a predisposition to reject whatever seems to contradict what we think we know about how the world works. All of these things conspire to keep us from actually hearing the Gospel, and we kind of like it that way. We are afraid that if we really heard the Gospel in its fullness, we might have to change the way we think and the way we live.

So we are unable to remove these blockages by our own power. We need the power of Jesus to clean out our ears for us. We need to ask Him to take away all the things that are preventing our reception of the Gospel in its fullness. We need to say with another man who appears later in this Gospel, "Lord, I believe. Help thou my unbelief."

The third thing Jesus did with the man in the story was to spit and then touch the man's tongue. I don't believe he spit on his tongue. He spit on the ground as though expelling the obstructions that were keeping the man from speaking clearly.

Once again there are obstacles that work to inhibit us from speaking clearly to others about our faith. We need to spit them out. There are feelings of embarrassment because our culture says it is not polite to talk about religion in public. Spit out that social taboo. There are fears of being labeled a nut or a religious fanatic. Spit out those fears as well. There are feelings of inadequacy which strangely do not seem to be a problem when we talk about our grandchildren or our vacation or one of our hobbies or some other matter of much less importance than our faith. Spit out those feeling of inadequacy. Just start talking. The words will come.

And the reason the words will come is the final thing that Jesus did for the man in the story. He touched the man's tongue, just as He had touched his ears, and then He breathed on him. He breathed His own

breath into him, just as God breathed His own Spirit into the nostrils of Adam at the creation. And He said, “Be opened.”

Be opened. Let the ears that I have touched be opened. Let the tongue that I have touched be loosed. And so it was. And so it will be with you when Jesus takes you away from all the distractions of the world, and touches your ears so that you may hear, and touches your tongue so that you may speak and breathes His own breath into you so that you may live. He will do that if you ask Him. He will do it if you let Him.

Oh Lord, open thou our ears, that we may hear thy voice.

“O Lord, open thou our lips. And our mouth shall show forth thy praise.”^{viii}

--oo0oo--

St. David's Anglican Church
Charlottesville, Virginia
August 10, 2008

ⁱ “Any set of Psalms and Lessons appointed for the evening of any day may be read at the morning service, and any set of morning Psalms and Lessons may be read in the evening.” *Concerning the Service of the Church, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER* viii (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

ⁱⁱ *Psalms and Lessons for the Christian Year (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER* xxxiii (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

ⁱⁱⁱ *Isaiah 29:18-end (KJV).*

^{iv} *St. Mark 7:31-end (KJV).*

^v W. MURRAY SEVERANCE, *PRONOUNCING BIBLE NAMES REV. ED. 31* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 1985).

^{vi} *St. Mark 7:33-35 (RSV).*

^{vii} *The Order for Daily Morning Prayer, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER 7* (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943), from *Psalm 51:15 (KJV), alt.*

^{viii} *Ibid.*