**Jesus heals a deaf and dumb man** 19/5/24dkm

Read: Isaiah 35, Mark 7:24-37

Text: Mark 7:31-37

Psalms: 146, 107:1-9, 147:1-9, 85:10-13

I grew up with lots of cousins. We went to school together, we went to church together, and we played sport together. But I remember one family that lived on a nearby dairy farm and was not related; we called them ‘uncle’ and ‘aunty’, but they were not related. Moreover, they were Catholic. They also had a son who was deaf and dumb; I think his mother had German measles when she was pregnant. This boy could make noises but never learnt to speak, as far as I know. The therapy we have today was not available then.

Our passage today is about a man who ‘had an impediment in his speech’ (7:32). This impediment must have been serious because at the touch of Jesus ‘his tongue was loosed and he spoke plainly’ (7:35). He is often described as a deaf mute, or as being deaf and dumb. Our subheadings are: ‘Pitiful case’, ‘Physical touch’, ‘Public proclamation’.

**1. Pitiful case**

Mark is the only gospel writer to record this healing miracle. It occurred when Jesus was returning from the region of Tyre and Sidon, a region beyond the borders of Israel. Jesus went there to get away from the crowds that were following him in Galilee, and also from the Pharisees who were harassing him. He wanted time alone with his disciples so he could teach them.

We have seen that he healed the daughter of the Syro-Phoenician woman because of her great faith. After an unspecified period of time Jesus left Tyre and Sidon and went back to the Sea of Galilee, but to the eastern shore, a region known as the Decapolis, the region of ten cities. Jesus had previously been in this region and healed a demon -possessed man. It was a predominantly Gentile region, but Jesus was still known in this region. The man from whom he cast out the demons did what Jesus told him to do, namely tell everyone what Jesus had done for him (5:19,20). Do people around you know what Jesus has done for you?

Here in the Decapolis a deaf and dumb man was brought to Jesus by family or friends, begging Jesus to heal him, or put his hand on him’ (7:32). Nothing is said about this man, or the demon-possessed man, being a Jew or a Gentile, but Jesus was outside the borders of Israel at that time.

**2. Physical touch**

Most people, the Jews at least, thought Jesus had to touch a person in order to heal them. In and around Capernaum people just wanted to touch the hem of his coat to be healed. It is interesting that the two Gentiles Jesus healed were not even present when he healed them, namely the Centurion’s servant and the Syro-Phoenician’s daughter. This deaf and dumb man was brought to Jesus so that he might ‘put his hand on him’, and this is what Jesus did (7:32). Jesus also prayed, but remember this man could not hear, not until Jesus opened his ears. Jesus deliberately touched his ears as a mark of opening his ears, and also touched his tongue. Jesus healed in all manner of ways. He did not rely on a particular ritual or prayer formula, in contrast to pagan healers, and indeed, Christian healers today. Jesus healed people with a ‘personal touch’, even when they were brought to him in great numbers.

The people who brought this deaf and dumb man to Jesus believed Jesus had the power to heal him. The showed faith in Jesus, but what about the man himself? We read that Jesus took him aside from the crowd (7:33). For many healers the bigger the crowd the better, but Jesus’ focus was on the sick man himself. He wanted the undivided attention of this afflicted soul. Was he looking for a sign of faith? The man’s ears were effectively closed, so Jesus put his fingers in his ears to open them (7:33). But this was not a medical operation; it was a supernatural operation!

One of the signs of the messianic age, as set out by the prophet Isaiah, was that ‘the ears of the deaf will be unstopped… and the tongue of the dumb sing’ (Isa 35:5, 6). Jesus reminded John the Baptist of this prophecy when he sent a message to John in prison (Mat 11:5). Mark may be reminding us of this messianic prophecy by recording this particular healing performed by Jesus- the only gospel writer to do so. Matthew and Luke tell us of a man who was mute and demon-possessed being healed, but there is no mention of the deaf and dumb man here in Mark being demon-possessed. Even so, all these healings point to Jesus fulfilling the words of the prophet.

The touching of Jesus continued, with him spitting and touching the man’s tongue (7:33). The man’s tongue was, in effect, ‘bound’ because he could not speak. Some beggars in India had no tongue and therefore could not speak. Why did that have no tongue? Such a deformity is not natural; it was inflicted by the unscrupulous and wicked ‘owners’ of the beggar! Jesus had opened this poor man’s ears, and now he would ‘loose’ his tongue. Jesus proceeded to spit and then touch his tongue (7:33). We assume he spat on his fingers before putting them on the man’s tongue, just as he spat in the blind man’s eyes in the next chapter (8:23). Some, however, suggest he spat on the ground, as if symbolically removing the impediment in his mouth.

The third thing Jesus did in healing this man was look up to heaven and pray (7:34). He prayed with a sigh, and with an Aramaic word meaning ‘Be opened’. The look to heaven was a look toward his heavenly Father. He was healing this man in the power of his heavenly Father. Jesus was doing the works the Father sent him to do. The sigh was related to the messianic age he was inaugurating. Jesus saw the suffering of this man and other afflicted people as a sign of sin and Satan’s power in the world. At the grave of Lazarus his sighing became groaning. When Jesus spoke it was just a word in Aramaic, a word uttered with a deep sigh yet with great force. This word was the first word this man ever heard because his ears were immediately opened.

That this man could now ‘speak plainly’ is amazing and miraculous. He had never heard a word spoken and had never learned to speak. Now that he could hear, he would need lots of speech therapy before he could speak clearly. But no, the healing of Jesus was not partial, it was total. The man could now hear and speak like any other person. He was made ‘whole’ we might say, although there is no mention of him following Jesus. The demon-possessed man wanted to follow Jesus, but Jesus sent him home to tell his family and friends the wonderful things the Lord had done for him (5:19). Did he do the same with this man? Has he done the same with you? Maybe Jesus is calling you to go further afield to tell people about Jesus where his name is not known.

**3. Public proclamation**

That Jesus ‘commanded them that they should tell no one’ seems strange in view of his earlier command to the demon-possessed man of the same region. Firstly, note the plural ‘they’ in verse 36; while Jesus took this man aside, those who brought him, and probably others, were looking on. They would have seen that their friend could now hear and speak clearly. Secondly, this healing was some time after his previous visit to this region. Jesus had gone through the region of Tyre and Sidon to escape the attention of the crowds and the Pharisees: one group wanted to make him king and the other wanted to kill him! Jesus was not ready for either; he was walking according to the will and the timetable of his heavenly Father.

Amazingly, the more Jesus commanded these people to go away quietly, the more widely they proclaimed Jesus and what he had done (7:36). Actually, such a response is not so amazing! I am sure you have found children doing the exact opposite of what you tell them to do. The author Mark Twain wrote, ‘Swimming pools were forbidden us and therefore much frequented’. And not only children behave like this! Adults do not like being told what to do either! With some people I learned to simply drop a hint and then watch them come up with their own idea based on this hint! With others, the best way to get them to do something was to suggest the opposite! This is the perversity of human nature, a perversity that sadly belongs to us all. I don’t think Jesus was telling them what not to do hoping they would do the opposite, but such is the perversity with which many relationships operate!

The people were truly astonished by what Jesus did, and to this extent their reaction, their disobedience to his command, is understandable. Their proclamation that, ‘He makes both the deaf to hear and the mute to speak’ (7:37) resonated with Mark, and resonates with us, in the light of the words of the prophet already referred to. This was probably the reason Mark recorded this healing. If he was writing for a predominantly Gentile audience, Jesus’ ministry in a predominantly Gentile region was significant.

Also significant are the words, ‘He had done all things well’ (7:37). If the crowds were unknowingly referring to the words of the prophet, they were also referring to the words of Moses in Genesis 1- either knowingly or unknowingly. The account of creation found at the beginning of the Bible was probably better known than the words of the prophets. It is the same today, even if people have their own theories about the creation. When God created the heavens and the earth and everything in it, he ‘saw everything that he had made, and indeed it was very good’ (Gen 1:31). We cannot miss the similarity in the words recorded by Mark. The proclamation of the people regarding Jesus, after his demonstration of the power of God to heal a deaf and dumb man, reflects the proclamation at the end of Genesis 1- ‘Indeed, it was very good’.

What God made in the beginning was very good - it was perfect. But sin entered the world through Adam and Eve and everything in the perfect world was corrupted. Disease and death are part of this corruption. In showing his power over disease, not to mention demons and even death, Jesus was pointing to the ultimate work the Father sent him to do, namely overcome sin and death through his own death and resurrection. ‘He has done all things well’. Is this what you believe, and what you see in your life? Even if we suffer affliction in this world, even ongoing affliction, we know that Jesus has overcome the world, so we can be of good cheer (John 16:33). We look forward to the new heavens and new earth, the home of righteousness, and of no more suffering or pain or death.