

## 8.27.23 – Pentecost 13

### “Cry Out, then Listen!”

The United Baptist Church, Annandale, VA

#### **Psalm 119:169-176 (The Message)**

<sup>169-176</sup> Let my cry come right into your presence, God;  
provide me with the insight that comes only from your Word.  
Give my request your personal attention,  
rescue me on the terms of your promise.  
Let praise cascade off my lips;  
after all, you’ve taught me the truth about life!  
And let your promises ring from my tongue;  
every order you’ve given is right.  
Put your hand out and steady me  
since I’ve chosen to live by your counsel.  
I’m homesick, God, for your salvation;  
I love it when you show yourself!  
Invigorate my soul so I can praise you well,  
use your decrees to put iron in my soul.  
And should I wander off like a lost sheep—seek me!  
I’ll recognize the sound of your voice.

**Leader: These are Prayerful Words of Man for God!** All: Thanks be to God!

#### **Mark 7:31-37 (NIV)**

*Jesus Heals a Deaf and Mute Man*

<sup>31</sup> 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 Jesus to place his hand on him.

<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.”

**Leader: These Words of Healing and Faith Are of God!** All: Thanks be to God!

#### **Please pray with me:**

Dear Jesus, we thank you for your healing spirit and the gift of touch. We may not know the lessons you intend for us during times of healing and recovery, yet we trust your compassion and love. Help us to embrace your strength and power as you demonstrate it through healing others. Instruct us as we learn these healing stories of your grace and mercy. May your voice be the one heard today as you speak through mine. Amen.

Are you ready for Fall? I am not, but it is creeping up on us, so please enjoy the last vestiges of summer. We had a lovely UBC Friends & Family Breakfast yesterday morning at Anthony's in Falls Church. Watch for the next one, and we hope you'll join us at a different location.

In this week's section of Psalm 119, remember that in the longest psalm and acrostic poem, David is seeking God's mercy and forgiveness. He cries out in both praise and petition, reminding God he follows his word, yet humbly confessing he has strayed from God's commandments. In just these few verses, he cries out in anguish, but remembers to listen for God's response, and repents his own arrogance: "And should I wander off like a lost sheep—seek me! I'll recognize the sound of your voice."

At the UBC Friends & Family Breakfast, we heard a poem of sacred rest given only by the Shepherd, and it reminded us as the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm does that the Lord is also **our** Shepherd, and he cares for each one of his flock and knows our names and needs individually. The psalmist's God and shepherd knows that we need to rest in his care, not trying so hard to do it all ourselves physically, mentally, emotionally, or spiritually. We too may be at a "crying out for the Lord's strength" point, but as David confesses with great humility how much he loves his shepherd and strives to obey his Word, he realizes that God's compassion only comes by *listening* for it. Like we have seen all this month, the beginning verses of this section bargain with God, explaining how the writer thinks he has earned God's mercy and forgiveness, but sounding contrite, he admits the truth of his waywardness and how much he really does need and love God, despite and because of his disobedience. There is a lot we can learn and apply to our lives from this psalm. It is ok to cry out for the Lord, but

then, we must listen to his guidance, possible correction, and most likely instructions to rest and abide in him and his word through the Scriptures and his Son, Jesus.

A similar experience happens in our Mark 7 passage as we learn about another healing miracle for a man whose condition has kept him from social status or interaction, much like the man with leprosy we learned about last Sunday. In fact, the people pitied him because he could not hear or speak clearly; he was deaf and partially mute. This miracle is only recorded in the Gospel of Mark but is alluded to in Matthew. There are some geographic discrepancies in Mark. According to our passage, from Tyre, Jesus went north 20 miles through Sidon, a coastal city; then avoiding Galilee, he went to the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee to the region of Decapolis (which means 10 cities). However, if you look at today's maps, Tyre and Sidon are on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea and more like 40+ miles away to the west of the Sea of Galilee. The Decapolis area is on the opposite side of the Sea of Galilee; a journey of over 40 miles would take Jesus a minimum of two days' walking if he didn't stop to visit people or preach and teach along the way—more likely 3 or 4 days travelling. That amount of time was not mentioned.

When Jesus got to the Decapolis, a group of people there begged him to place his hand on a deaf man who could hardly talk; he was not entirely mute but spoke with great difficulty. His impediment was so severe that no one could understand what he was trying to say. Christ used a type of sign language to privately communicate with the man; he touched his ears by placing his fingers inside them. He spat on the ground and some translations say he took his spittle and touched the man's

tongue. All translations allude to the fact that Jesus looked heavenward to God in a prayer of intercession and pity for this man's circumstances. The people all believed Satanic powers had enslaved the man, and their faith had called on Jesus to help free him. Many had heard how Jesus freed the Gerasene prisoner from many demons and how Jesus had sent Satan's evil into the pigs and over the cliff. And that man went to temple in his right mind! Although this man's healing was done privately, they all heard how Jesus called out in an Aramaic command "Ephphatha!" which means "Be opened!" The unnamed man's ears **were** opened, and his tongue was loosened to allow clear speech! Jesus told the man and the people close by to be silent about what they heard or witnessed (remember Mark's "Messianic Secret" emphasis?), but because they were amazed, the more he insisted on secrecy, the more they told others about this miracle of healing.

There are three key points to this story: 1) the significance of words spoken; 2) the private healing touch of Jesus; and 3) the prayer of intercession from others who asked. First, Jesus' use of spit may have been a local folk remedy that worked over time, but the single word Ephphatha as an emphatic command showed Jesus' divine power coupled with the man's and his community's faith in Jesus and of course, the will of God to heal him. Secondly, the private nature of this healing speaks to a conversion experience perhaps. When you and I were forgiven of our sins through our profession of faith and baptism, it was a private matter between you and God (though facilitated by a pastor). This healing symbolizes a social, mental, and emotional healing as well as a physical one, much like our own salvation experience does. Like our other healing

stories in August, both word and touch were used. Thirdly, the fact that others had faith, mercy, and love enough to present this man to Jesus was a testimony to the man's potential.

The people knew God's prophecy and laws. Prophecy had long taught that in a new age all will be made new like in the beginning of the world (in Isaiah 35:5) "<sup>5</sup> Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped." The speech impediment that was healed and described in our passage uses the Greek term "*Mogilalos*" which appears only one other place in the Bible, in Isaiah 35:5-6. After centuries of war, exile, and destruction, the Hebrews and Gentiles were rebuilding their hope because of Jesus' teachings and these miracles. Prophets like Isaiah predicted a restoration and a messenger. Believers had seen how God sent John the Baptist to prepare a way for Jesus; they even hoped it was Elijah returned! In Matthew 11:12-17, we hear:

<sup>12</sup> From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been subjected to violence, and violent people have been raiding it. <sup>13</sup> For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John. <sup>14</sup> And if you are willing to accept it, he is the *Elijah* who was to come. <sup>15</sup> **Whoever has ears, let them hear.**

Christ's followers at least understood a deaf man could not hear God's word, much less share it with others if he were deaf and could not speak his testimony. This healing of senses occurred before the disciples' minds were opened. Perhaps this was a symbolic healing before Jesus opened the ears, eyes, and mouths of his disciples.

What can we learn from these stories? We may not have Jesus' touch, but we do have Scripture, his words, so let's use them. The last key point about interceding for others who cannot care for themselves got my

attention, too. Yes, we are not natural or divine healers, but we can influence and care for others. We do this in different ways, some through healing arts and skills, and some through hospitality, and for others we pray intercession for friends and family, and God actually does the healing. We too must ask when we need intercession or healing. We must cry out when we need Jesus' healing touch, privately or publicly. But the most important next step is to listen for God's direction, love, mercy, and compassion. If we are not paying close attention, we might miss it! Amen? Amen. //

**Will you pray with me?** All gracious God, we thank you for our health whatever it is. We thank you for the supernatural healing that is available to each of us through salvation and eternal life. Lord, we humble ourselves in the presence of your healing power. Keep those we know and love safe, strong, healthy, faithful, and motivated to continue serving others here on earth. Let us proclaim your name in all we do, for it is in your name that we pray and dedicate our lives. **Amen.**