

Sermon: One Praise Away

Scripture: Isaiah 35:4-7a, Mark 7:31-34

September 5, 2021

Christian Ko Choi

Westminster Presbyterian Church

Springfield, Illinois

Our first Scripture reading is from Isaiah 35:4-7a. This chapter is a prediction of the glory and flourishing body of Christ, and of the many blessings which the Christ will endow upon God's people. May we all be blessed through the Word of the Lord.

Say to those who are of a fearful heart,

“Be strong, do not fear!

Here is your God.

He will come with vengeance,

with terrible recompense.

He will come and save you.”

Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,

and the ears of the deaf unstopped;

then the lame shall leap like a deer,

and the tongue of the speechless sing for

joy.

For waters shall break forth in the wilderness,

and streams in the desert;

the burning sand shall become a pool,

and the thirsty ground springs of water.

Amen.

Our Gospel reading today comes from Mark 7. In this chapter, we can learn about the Jesus' relationship with both the Jews and the Gentiles. In the first half of the chapter, Jesus teaches one's heartfelt intention is which that matters and not the traditions to the Pharisees. Then he heals two Gentiles, first the daughter of the Syrophenician woman, followed by today's reading, healing of a deaf man. Here now, the Word of the Lord from Mark 7:31-37.

Then [Jesus] returned from the region of Tyre, and went by way of Sidon towards the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis. They brought to him a deaf man who had an impediment in his speech; and they begged him to lay his hand on him. He took him aside in private, away from the crowd, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spat and touched his tongue. Then looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, "Ephphatha," that is, "Be opened." And immediately his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. Then Jesus ordered them to tell no one; but the more he ordered them, the more zealously they proclaimed it. They were astounded beyond measure, saying, "He has done everything well; he even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak."

This is the Word of the Lord; Thanks be to God. Amen.

Please pray with me. Gracious God, thank you for your steadfast presence. As we take a break from our labor on this Labor Day weekend, may we rest our souls in your loving arms, seeking the peace and comfort through your Word. May the words of my mouth and the meditation of all our hearts be pleasing to you, our Rock and Redeemer.

One time, as I was looking through YouTube, listening to my favorite acapella group and barbershop quartet music, I was click-baited to watch something that brought tears to my eyes. It was a video titled, "My baby hears me for the first time." It is about a deaf baby hearing mom's voice for the first time after receiving cochlear implants. I remember as the implant was turned on, baby's eyes widening and mixture of emotions on the baby's face; briefly a hint of smile at first, then as quickly the smile had come, it was replaced by flood of emotions expressed by this innocent child, not knowing what to do! I remember afterwards, clicking on similar videos of deaf teenagers and young adults who either heard for the first time or regained their hearing back. And they too, had similar reactions after their implants were turned on; being overwhelmed with deep emotions which led to shed tears of joy. It is one of those videos that will make you feel that there is a sense of hope in this world, that moves you and leads you to cry with them as you watch. If you feel that there are not enough good and love in the world, you should go and watch these videos with a suggestion of a Kleenex in your hands.

Today's gospel story is a biblical version of this story from Mark 7, where a deaf and mute man is healed without a cochlear implants, but with a touch from Jesus. After Jesus examined him, by touching his ears and tongue, he gives a command, "be opened!," and the man's ears were opened, and his tongue was loosened to allow speak plainly. People who witnessed this event must have felt the same reactions to me and others who watched the deaf baby hearing for the first time. People were overwhelmed with amazement, full of hope, as they have seen what is possible with Jesus.

We need a brief historical understanding of what is taking place here. Decapolis, as the name states, is a region of ten cities which were Greek cities that served as a symbol of Roman dominion in the East. It cannot get any more Gentile region than Decapolis. Yet,

Jesus went to the region to bringing healing and hope to these people. Just like what is written Isaiah passage, Jesus came to fulfill the prophecy:

*Say to those who are fearful hearted, Be Strong, do not be afraid. The Lord, your God, will come and save you. The eyes of the blind shall be opened, the ears of the deaf unstopped; lame shall leap like a deer, the tongue of the speechless sing for joy.*

The same God, who was, is, and is to come, is with us and telling us the exact same message today. It might not be our physical ears and mouth that are deaf and mute, but our spiritual lives might be running on empty. Through last year and half of dealing with pandemic – through a loss of a beloved one, through a change of lifestyle, through ailments and deepening physical conditions, through various worries and anxieties, various other vices that you and I might have been through, and because of the combination and complexity of all such entanglement – our emotions have been through a lot, our inner spirit waned, and our spiritual muscles do not work as they once used to. Many of us are silently seeking a break from our current turmoil, looking for relief from the unknown of what may come next.

As we take a break from our labors this weekend, let us recenter our inner, spiritual compass, and lean on the promises of God. ***We sometimes forget that the heaviest doors often turn on the smallest hinges.*** Things that seem too overwhelming and too demanding are never too big for our God. Nothing is impossible for our Redeemer.

“Be strong. Do not be afraid. The Lord, your God, will come and save you.”

As it was with all the people who have experienced Jesus’ power of healing and source of hope, we are one praise away from experiencing it ourselves. Just like the person who was in complete despair by being deaf and mute, unable to express one’s own feelings freely, feeling trapped in their own body and the current circumstances without a way out, Jesus found a way – no, Jesus ***made*** a way. In the same way, Jesus will make a way and save you and me. In response, all we need to do is give one endless praise. So rather than waiting for the moment of realization that God’s spirit and small miracles have been all around us or receiving a confirmation/reassurance that God is with us, why not trust

in the faithfulness of God and give God the praise? As we give God our praise, God is surely to be ever more faithful, as we give God the attention, glory, and honor that is solely due.

For those who have experienced this amazing love of God, let us continue our one endless praise to the One who walks with us during the good and carries us during the bad times. Let us trust in the Lord.

As Matthew tells us,

Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear... Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothe like one of these... indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.<sup>1</sup>

Rather than worrying, let us place our unknowns at the foot of the cross, and do one thing that we know we can do. Let us give our greatest gift to the Lord by praying ceaselessly and praising God for all the good and blessings we have received, knowing God will be faithful still.

To God be the glory. Amen.

---

<sup>1</sup> Matthew 6:25-34