

Open Ears and Unleashed Tongues

Mark 7:31-37

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Sermon Part 1

Thanks for gathering with us this weekend as we worship through music and dive into the Word through the message. There are sure a lot of activities and events going on right now like the Rio Olympics. In the QCA we have the John Deere Classic in Silvis and the Men's Fastball World Tournament in Moline. On top of that, did you know that the Nina and Pinta are now docked in Davenport!

Speaking of historical celebrations, at least ten Edgewood couples are marking 50 years of marriage this year. Here's a picture that appeared in the Dispatch/Argus last Saturday of the couples that were married right here at Edgewood five decades ago. Let's give them a shout out because in an age of starter marriages and unholy hookups, these couples are keeping their vows to remain married for better or for worse – Paul and Janet Janecek, Dave and Diane Carnithan, Bob and Betty Daggett, Don and Delma Rose, Jim and Sharon Rice, and Larry and Pat McClean. Other EBC couples celebrating 50 years include: Glenn and Cindy Granger, Dave and Carol Guss, Bill and Myrna Orris and Jim and Mary Kay Sims. If you've been married 50 years or longer, could you stand?

With all that is going on, you could be gone this weekend, but you've chosen to gather with God's people. Way to go!

The order of our service is going to be unusual, as the sermon will be divided into two parts. We'll begin with a first person narrative and then we'll move to a time of praising followed by some more preaching and practical application.

In order to fully engage in God's Word, turn to Mark 7:31-37 and follow along. The passage is found on page 1072 in the pew Bible.

Go back in your minds not 50 years ago or even to 1492 when Columbus sailed the ocean blue, but all the way back to the year A.D. 32 and listen to this narrative from the perspective of a formerly deaf man who struggled to speak...

I wasn't born deaf but lost my hearing when I was a toddler. I could speak a little bit but apparently I was hard to understand because people would roll their eyes or laugh when I tried to formulate words. Some became impatient while most ostracized and isolated me because I couldn't hear what was being said.

I was completely cut off from all communication. I felt forgotten and was extremely lonely. People thought I was stupid because I stuttered and stammered. I knew I wasn't but I eventually wondered if they were right. It felt like my tongue was all tied up, like there was a chain holding it down.

Some thought I was demon possessed and others believed that God had judged me for some sin that my parents or I had committed. I was miserable and cut off from the community.

I had a double disability but I did have a few friends who cared about me. One day these guys brought me to Jesus – I didn't know who He was or that He was even in town. I couldn't really understand what they were saying but from their hand motions and facial gestures it appeared that they were urgently asking Jesus to help me. It actually looked like they were begging Him. Unbelievably, Jesus looked at me with love, put His arm around me and gently led me away from the crowds.

Jesus wasn't going to put on a performance for the people and He didn't treat me like I was a problem. For the first time, I felt like a person who mattered. When we were all alone, He did something that changed my life.

With His countenance full of compassion, Jesus took his two index fingers and thrust them into my ears! It's like He was using sign language, but more than that, He touched me at the point of my greatest disability. And then He did something that you might find gross but it meant the world to me – he spit on his fingers and then touched my tongue!

Jesus had my full attention at this point. As I gazed into His face, He looked up to heaven to show me that all glory goes to God the Father. And then, even though I couldn't hear yet, I saw Jesus take a very deep breath and blow air out of his mouth, like one does when sighing or groaning.

His sigh showed deep compassion for my situation because He loves to extend mercy to those in misery. My mind went to Isaiah 53:4: **“Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows.”** It felt like Jesus was saying, *“Your sorrows are MY sorrows.”* I love that Jesus is drawn to those with disabilities and that those who are hurting are drawn to Him.

And then He slowly sounded out a word so I could read His lips (remember, I couldn’t hear yet). This is what the Master mouthed to me – **“Eph-pha-tha!”** Mark translated it for you – it means, **“Be opened!”** It was a command that literally means, *“Be unbarred and completely opened!”*

Amazingly, my hearing was completely healed and it was like the chain tying up my tongue was immediately broken. I didn’t need any speech therapy and was able to speak plainly and perfectly!

Now that I could hear and holler I wanted to tell everyone what Jesus had done for me! But then Jesus gave a very strange command – He charged us to tell no one!

But we couldn’t help ourselves. The more He commanded us to be quiet, the more zealously we all proclaimed what He did. We were utterly astonished and completely confounded. A sense of awe and amazement gripped each of us. Mark did a good job capturing it when He wrote that we were **“astonished beyond measure.”** Incidentally, this was a common response of people when they caught a glimpse of who Jesus is. I understand that many in your culture today are bored with Jesus. I don’t get that at all!

People were never passive about Jesus. There’s no way to just ignore Him. He either made people angry or astonished or amazed or in awe. People fought against Him or they put their faith in Him.

As for us, we kept repeating this refrain: **“He has done all things well. He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak.”** He is a good God and is working everything together for your good and His glory. You might not catch the significance of the last phrase but it’s a reference to Isaiah 35:5-6, which is a precise prophecy written 700 years earlier that tells us what the Messiah would do when He showed up: **“Then the eyes of the blind shall be**

opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy.”

So let's not be tepid in our praise today! Let's let the lame leap and the mute be filled with music. May He untie our tongues so we can proclaim His praises! Please stand as I pray and then we'll bust out into praise together.

*O for a thousand tongues to sing
my great Redeemer's praise,
the glories of my God and King,
the triumphs of his grace!*

*Hear him, you deaf; his praise, you mute,
your loosened tongues employ;
you blind, behold your savior come,
and leap, you lame, for joy.*

→ O For a Thousand Tongues to Sing

Sermon Part 2

Prayer

*Holy Spirit, You are welcome here
Come flood this place and fill the atmosphere
Your glory, God, is what our hearts long for
To be overcome by Your presence, Lord*

We started by focusing on the perspective of the formerly deaf man. Now let's reflect on the response of Jesus. We'll then look at three results and wrap up with three requirements.

Response of Jesus

We can learn a lot from our Lord's response. Here are six truths I see.

1. Jesus makes the unreached a priority. Look at verse 31: *“Then he returned from the region of Tyre and went through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, in the*

region of the Decapolis.” This map shows the route Jesus took. Last week we saw that Jesus traveled to Tyre to minister to a mother and to deliver her demonized daughter. Now He heads twenty miles north to Sidon, which is very unusual. I wonder why He did that? We have no record of what He did there. One big thing He is doing is training the twelve so that they see the importance of reaching the unreached, especially those outside of Israel.

He then heads over to the area known as the Decapolis before eventually ending up back in Galilee. He’s taking the long way home. It would be like walking from here to Iowa City and then heading up to Cedar Rapids in order to go to Geneseo to get back to the Quad Cities.

It’s in the Decapolis where He ministers to a man who was unable to hear or speak clearly. It’s significant that Jesus came back to this region because in Mark 5:18 the people from this area begged Him to depart from them. Aren’t you glad that Jesus doesn’t give up on us? He’s giving these people a second chance. I love how many of the people are now excited to see Jesus. How did that happen? It’s because of the faithful testimony of the formerly demonized man who was deployed to live on mission with his neighbors.

Look now at verse 32: ***“And they brought to him a man who was deaf and had a speech impediment, and they begged him to lay his hand on him.”*** Jesus goes to an out of the way place in order to reach someone who felt out of place because He has a special place in His heart for those who have special needs!

Many of our schools and colleges have already started classes. Some parents are sad about this and others are filled with joy. I saw some pictures this week that made me laugh. Here’s one...

I’d like all of our teachers (including homeschool teachers), those who work in administration, coaches and custodians to stand. I also want to give a shout out to all students in homeschool, elementary, junior high, high school and college. Could you also stand? You are commissioned to live on mission on your campus! Just as Jesus made the unreached a priority, so too, you are unleashed to reach the unreached. May God use you this year to give special attention to those with special needs.

It's not easy to target the unreached. It often means going long distances and sacrificing comfort. I want to invite our newest Go Team couple up front right now...

Interview Couple

2. Jesus ministers in private. Jesus makes the unreached a priority and He also ministers in private so there would be no distractions. Notice the first part of verse 33: ***“And taking him aside from the crowd privately...”*** This would help the man be less self-conscious and was a way that Jesus demonstrated the dignity of the disabled.

In Mark 8:23 Jesus did something similar for another man with a disability: ***“And He took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village...”*** When the hypocritical religious leaders brought a woman caught in adultery to Jesus, Jesus waited until each of them left before talking to her in private. One of my favorite verses is found in Matthew 12:20, which is a quote from Isaiah 42: ***“A bruised reed He will not break, and a smoldering wick He will not snuff out.”***

Are you allowing Jesus to minister to you in private? While it's essential to gather in a large group and to also plug into a Growth Group, it's critical to have private time with Jesus every day in His Word and in prayer.

3. Jesus touches personally. Jesus ministered privately to this man and He also personally touched Him as we see in the second half of verse 33: ***“...He put His fingers into his ears, and after spitting touched his tongue.”*** This was an early form of simple sign language.

4. Jesus reframes perspective. The next thing we see from Jesus is found in the front part of verse 34: ***“And looking up to heaven...”*** He wanted this man to know where the source of power and healing comes from. Instead of just focusing on his issues, Jesus wanted Him to put his attention on the Almighty. Psalm 123:1: ***“To you, I lift up my eyes, O you who are enthroned in the heavens!”***

Jesus is demonstrating prayerful dependence as He did many times in the gospels. When He took the five loaves and two fish, Mark 6:41 says, ***“He looked up to heaven and said a blessing...”*** Before raising Lazarus from the dead, John 11:41 records: ***“And Jesus lifted up His eyes and said, ‘Father, I thank you that you have heard me.’”*** And in John 17:1 Jesus begins His prayer this way: ***“He lifted***

up His eyes to heaven, and said, ‘Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you.’

When people spend time with you, does their perspective change because they see you looking up? Are you pointing people to God or to the garbage around them?

5. Jesus shows pain. Jesus is not distant from our discouragement but comes close with His compassion. We see this in the phrase found in the middle of verse 34: *“He sighed...”* The Greek word here was used of the snorting of a horse, which helps us see that Jesus was really broken up by this man’s misery.

Aren’t you glad that we have a Savior who sympathizes with our sorrows? Psalm 34:18: *“The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit.”* Hebrews 4:15: *“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.”*

One day a boy came home from school looking really sad. His mom asked him what was wrong and her son said his friend Billy’s dad had died. He told his mom that Billy was so upset that he cried and cried all day. The mother asked her son what he did when he saw his friend crying. He replied, *“I just laid my head on my desk and cried with him.”* He was living out Romans 12:15: *“Weep with those who weep.”*

Oh, that we would have tender hearts and tears in our eyes when we’re with people in pain! Before moving on, let me point out that compassion comes out of communion with the Father. If your heart is hard, spend time with God in prayer. One prayer that I often pray is this: *“God, break my heart for what breaks your heart.”*

6. Jesus speaks a word of proclamation. When the Savior speaks, amazing things happen. Check out the last part of verse 34: *“and said to him, ‘Ephphatha’, that is, ‘Be opened.’”* All God had to do was say the word and the world came into being. I love what the Centurion said in Matthew 8:8: *“But only say the word and my servant will be healed.”* Psalm 33:9: *“For He spoke, and it came to be.”*

As we ponder these six points, we see Jesus in action [demonstrate], engaging His feet as He walks to the unreached man with special needs, He uses His arm to take

the man aside, He places His fingers in the ears, He spits and then He touches the man's tongue, His head and eyes look up, His breathing becomes pronounced as He sighs and then He uses His mouth to speak a word of release and freedom.

Since we're called to follow in the steps of Jesus, let's do the same by...

- Making the unreached with special needs a priority
- Ministering privately to people
- Touching the hurting personally
- Giving people God's perspective
- Showing pain when we hear of problems
- Speaking a word of gospel proclamation

3 Results

There are then three results that flow from the response of Jesus.

1. Immediate healing. Look at verse 35: *“And his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly.”*

2. Zealous proclamation. Strangely, Jesus wants them to keep quiet about what happened in verse 36: *“And Jesus charged them to tell no one. But the more He charged them, the more zealously they proclaimed it.”* Good news is hard to keep quiet, isn't it? It's interesting that they are told to tell no one and they tell everyone; we are told to tell everyone and we seldom tell anyone.

3. Overwhelming astonishment. This passage ends on a note of praise with a reference to fulfilled prophecy in verse 37: *“And they were astonished beyond measure, saying, ‘He has done all things well. He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak.’”* The tense of this verse shows us that they were in a continuous state of being awestruck.

3 Requirements

What do we do with all this? I wrote down three requirements.

1. Bring those with a disability or disorder to Jesus. I experienced a temporary disability a week ago Monday when I was using an electric hedge trimmer up on a ladder while standing on the step above the step that says don't step any higher on

the ladder. As I balanced precariously I made a swipe with my right hand right into the pinky on my left hand. If the Olympic judges were scoring it would be hedge trimmer – 1 and pinky – 0. I ended up in the ER with 5 stitches and quite a bit of sympathy because it looked pretty gross.

My pinky has almost healed but some of you are living with a condition for which there is no healing. Some of you parents and grandparents have a child or grandchild with special needs.

I learned this week that nearly 1 in 5 Americans live with some kind of disability. About 10% of our population has a severe disability. I'm ashamed to say I didn't know this and I haven't been thinking enough about how Edgewood can do a better job of helping those with some kind of handicap. I ask your forgiveness for that. We are adding some additional handicapped parking spots on the east side of the building. Just a reminder to leave some space in the front of these spaces so people can walk to the building.

In order to understand more about what its like for someone who is deaf, I contacted several people this past week. I spoke with my brother-in-law who has a twin brother who is deaf and I also contacted my niece who is studying audiology.

I also contacted EBC Member Jennifer Gerischer, who is an Interpreter. Here's some of what she shared with me: *"Hearing people (non-signers) think that Deaf people are stupid and can't do things for themselves. Deaf people can do EVERYTHING a hearing person can do except hear."* The person who trained Jennifer is deaf and added this, *"its very painful being isolated from society or a place of worship...you feel unworthy and you long to be a part of the group...that's why Deaf people hang out with each other..."* [Jennifer shared the Scripture passage with her and I love her response] *I have never thought Jesus would use some form of gesture to get his message across to the deaf man."*

Justin Brooks is deaf and attended EBC before moving out of state with his wife Belynda. Here are some things he wrote down: *"Being deaf is like having an invisible disability. From the outside, everything looks normal...Most people don't know that when they talk to me, I'm trying to read their lips, predict what they are going to say and generally miss roughly 50% or more of what is being said. Loud noisy places mean I'm missing more. So in large gatherings of people, I tend to feel my loneliest* [it's pretty cool that Jesus met with the deaf man away from the crowd].

“It would be nice if people didn't get mad when I can't understand them and ask them to repeat themselves...I'm working feverishly at trying to decode what they are saying while trying to not sound like a fool...My mind is trying to construct your sentence from the bits of speech I heard and the movement of your lips. I also probably have zero context to try and build this sentence from.

“Just because I'm deaf does not mean I know sign language. I feel trapped in the middle between the hearing and the non-hearing. Thankfully things are starting to come around for people in this middle ground as our ranks will be soon filling with the baby boomers and the millennials who wear ear buds 24/7. More resources are becoming available to us. I hope as technology advances, voice to text becomes more reliable and widely used.

“I wish people would take a moment to look at me when they speak, enunciate and say what they need to in a normal calm tone of voice. When it's rushed, garbled, yelled, or you're looking the other way, the conversation is going to be a rough one for both of us...When I answer your question with some off the wall response, don't get angry and think I'm messing with you. I'm trying hard and I'm sorry that I'm not perfect. If you say something and I don't respond, don't assume I'm ignoring you. I probably have no idea that you are trying to address me.

“I cringe when I hear people say if they had to be disabled, they'd pick being deaf. They don't realize that being deaf is invisible isolation. It's not fun, it's very tough, it becomes a huge part of who you are, it invariably dictates almost every moment in life.

“Of all the disabilities out there, if I had to choose one to be, being deaf is not the one I'd choose. I'd choose the disability of being a Packers Fan.”

Here's a verse for those of us who can hear and see: Leviticus 19:14: ***“You shall not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block before the blind, but you shall fear your God: I am the LORD.”***

Team, we must become more aware of what it's like for those with disabilities, disorders and special needs. And we must reach out and embrace them as Jesus says in Luke 14:13-14: ***“But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just.”*** I'll be bringing one of our

neighbors over to our Block Party this afternoon in her wheelchair. I also pick up her newspaper and hand it to her every morning.

If you want to grow in your understanding of those with a disability, I highly recommend that you use your free RightNow Media account and watch some teaching by Joni Eareckson Tada, who is a quadriplegic. I was also greatly helped by a seminar called, “10 Special Needs of Special Needs Parents.” Go to edgewoodbaptist.net to get your free account and just type “disability” in the search bar. I printed some copies and put them on the Resource Table.

2. Surrender to God’s sovereignty. Are you struggling right now to say, “*He has done all things well?*” Sometimes God doesn’t heal. In fact, Exodus 4:11 says: “*Then the LORD said to him, ‘Who has made man’s mouth? Who makes him mute, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? Is it not I, the LORD?’*”

I had a conversation with someone recently about a difficult situation he is facing regarding a family member’s disorder. I was sympathetic as I practiced my “sighing” and asked him how he was doing with everything. While I can’t quote his answer, here’s a summary of what he said: “*We are seeking the glory of God and trusting that in His sweet sovereignty He will use our situation for His purposes.*” All I could do was nod my head as tears filled my eyes. This young man is living out his theology and has fully surrendered to the sovereignty of God.

Have you done the same? Can you say, “*He has done all things well*” even it’s not working out the way you would like?

3. Ask God to give you spiritual ears so you can be saved. I can’t imagine how difficult a physical disability must be. But some of you have a spiritual disability. If you are not yet saved, your sins have separated you from God. You’ve been cut off from communication because you are spiritually deaf and blind. But Jesus is a compassionate Savior who is close to you right now. Reach out to Him and ask Him to save you so your eyes and ears can be opened and your tongue can confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

I came across an ancient baptism prayer that is still used in some churches. It’s called the Ephphatha (be opened) prayer. As the pastor touches the ears and then the mouth of the one being baptized, he prays, “*The Lord has made the deaf hear and the mute speak. May He touch your ears to receive His word, and your mouth to proclaim Him, to the praise and glory of God the Father. Amen.*”

Another big event took place this weekend called the **Tug Fest**. The main attraction is a tug of war across the Mississippi between those who live in LeClarie, Iowa and those from Port Byron, Illinois.

Are you in a tug of war with God today? If so, you're not going to win so you might as well take your hand off the rope. Are you ready to do that?

Closing Song: Come You Sinners