

## Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost

**Sermon Text:** Mark 7:31-37

**Theme:** “*This amazing day*”

Grace, peace and mercy to you from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

It can be difficult to share our faith, the reason we put our hope in God’s plan of salvation, with other people, especially those who are not Christian. In these days of political correctness we might worry about offending people. It could be that we are worried someone might ask a question we just can’t answer. Maybe we just don’t think the Christian faith that amazing anymore. How on earth can Christianity compete against so many other options, all of which may appear so much more entertaining, relevant or exciting?

The second half of our gospel reading tells the story of Jesus healing a man who was deaf and who had a speech impediment. This man is miraculously healed and his friends and family want to tell everyone this good news and that it was Jesus who performed the miracle. The more Jesus asks them to tell no one, the more they speak up. Undeterred, they are going to share their good news, their hope, their faith with all they meet on this amazing day.

Heavenly Father, sanctify us in the truth, your Word is truth. Amen.

### **Does anything amaze anymore?**

We live in amazing times. Surely each generation has witnessed significant advances in technology, but the past forty to fifty years has seen such spectacular leaps and bounds, it is hard to keep pace. I still remember laughing at the thought of a secret spy having a phone hidden in his shoe. I mean, just imagine being like Maxwell Smart, able to make a phone call wherever you were! These days of course, almost everyone, and especially younger people have a mobile phone. In 1980, I was part of a select number of students who had the opportunity to visit a neighbouring high school to witness their new computer that of course took up a large portion of the room it was in. Well now I write my sermons on a laptop computer I can carry under my arm. Many people today will remember where they were when Neil Armstrong landed on the moon. That’s because it was special, it was amazing – it had never been done before. Most people today would struggle to remember the last time a space shuttle took off, it has become routine and no longer amazing. (28<sup>th</sup> August and currently docked with the International Space Station.)

We have become so used to this amazing world in which we live and the rapid advances in technology, we no longer seem to be amazed at very much at all. New discoveries might be interesting for a moment, but they rarely surprise us anymore.

If we have become so immune to the amazement of technology, we might we ask if we have lost our sense of amazement when it comes to our God? The second part of today’s gospel reading describes the way in which Jesus was able to heal the man who was deaf and who couldn’t speak properly. Isn’t this an extraordinary story, one that deserves to be told again and again? First of all we have his friends and family who heard of Jesus and the amazing things he had already done, so they probably thought it can’t hurt to bring this man to be healed. Now Jesus takes the man to one side and he put his fingers into his ears and he touched his tongue. This isn’t what healed the man, but it is what Jesus did to connect with him personally. Jesus then commanded the man, “Be opened”. The whole person is opened to God and this is witnessed through the opening of the ears through which he can now hear and the opening of the mouth through which he can now speak clearly.

We are blessed because we have all of God’s Word that describes many of the things Jesus did. For a man who could walk on water, feed thousands, die on the cross and come back to life, maybe healing a man of deafness and giving him speech isn’t such a big deal. Maybe we just gloss over this story like so many others we read in the Bible. But for this man’s friends and family, it was a great deal, and so they began to tell everyone about it. Even though Jesus was not ready for people to hear all this news, and even though he asked them very strongly not to tell other people, they couldn’t keep their mouths shut. On this amazing day, they just had to tell everyone what good things Jesus had done for them and for their friend.

By way of contrast, just as these people couldn't keep their mouth shut, it seems at times we struggle to open our mouths so other people can hear the good news *we already know about Jesus*. Is it because we are no longer amazed about Jesus? Do we think that everyone else has already heard the stories so they won't want to listen to what we have to share? We seem to find it easier to talk about the latest football scores or who is dating who in the celebrity world, than to talk about what God has done for all people. The irony here is that for all the hype and excitement of a sporting event or a great news story, unless you are a die-hard fan, we quickly lose interest and we no longer remember any of the details. Why is this? Because in the big picture of life, they are fleeting moments of entertainment – they aren't the main game of life, eternal life, that God wants us to participate in.

The word that is translated as 'deaf' can also mean 'dull' or 'blunt'. Has your faith become dull or blunt? Does your conscience no longer bother you when you do the wrong thing? There are many examples you could reflect on, and for each one of you, they will look different. But the common thing will be that once upon a time, you would have felt guilty, then you might have felt embarrassed, then you feel angry at yourself for giving in, then you just give up and give in to the temptation in your life. Your conscience becomes dulled and your faith is blunted.

Maybe you are finding it difficult to read your Bible with much enthusiasm? It has become a drag and no longer seems to make sense or you struggle to see the relevance anymore. It could be that coming to church is difficult because there are other things that seem just that little bit more important. These may be signs that your faith may be dull or blunt.

### **Be amazed once more**

When our hearts are deaf to our amazing God, then it is no wonder that our witness towards others is mute as well. When that happens, there is only one place to go. The deaf man's friends brought him to Jesus. They pleaded with Jesus to lay hands on him so that he would be blessed and praise to God, even healed. Through Jesus' words of power, the man was healed so he could hear and speak clearly once more. Of course the great healing was that he was opened up once more towards God and his amazing desire to be in a good relationship with all of his people. It was Jesus' words that brought healing and completeness to this man.

Jesus still speaks to you through his powerful Word. Jesus continues to open his people up to an intimate relationship between each person and God. If God knows each hair of your head, he certainly knows who you are and what you need and what you care about. God knows you and he wants you to know him – personally. This is why you are encouraged to attend church services, why you are encouraged to read God's Word daily with devotion resources. Through his powerful Word, Jesus speaks to you and says, "Be opened".

With God's law, Jesus exposes your spiritual deafness. Jesus diagnoses what is wrong and what he needs to do in order for us to be fixed up. With God's gospel, Jesus tells you the amazing story of his love for us in the journey from the manger to the cross and the empty tomb. With that message, he is able to open your heart towards God so you hear clearly once more of the Father's love and forgiveness.

Today we celebrate Father's Day. It is an amazing day when we remember the gift of life that comes to each of us through our earthly fathers, all as part of our Heavenly Father's plan for each of us. Of course not all earthly fathers get it right all of the time. In fact sometimes we get it really wrong. But this day we celebrate that good, bad or otherwise, we have been given the gift of life through our dads, according to God's will.

On this amazing day, as together we celebrate Father's Day, Jesus says to you, "Ephphatha!" "Be opened" to the amazing gifts of life and healing with which you are restored to God and to one another. Trust that Jesus has opened your ears and loosened your tongue so you can share this good news with your friends and family.

May the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep guard over your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.