

Anglican Church of Noosa
I can see clearly Now - Mark 7:31-37 - Healing the Deaf
Rev'd Chris Johnson - August 22, 2021

We have just heard read a story about ordinary life. It is the story of a deaf man who couldn't speak, receiving healing. If you have ever been hard of hearing, or had a speech impediment, or have a family member or friend who is deaf, you will know the distress it can cause.

Jesus knew the distress and he cares. We have before us a simple act of compassion to a person in great need. This is about the ordinary stuff of life and the desire to have all our faculties and be able to contribute.

On the other hand, this passage is extraordinary. This is a miracle. This act raises the question about who it is who performs this miracle.

- If we know our Old Testament we'll be aware that there's a lot more going on here beneath the surface.
- If we are aware of the overall flow of Mark's Gospel we will know that he is building a case for Jesus being the Messiah.

Our series is entitled, "I can see clearly now." So this healing is about helping us to see more clearly that Jesus is the Messiah. It is simply one of many stories meant to open our spiritual eyes about the identity of Jesus and to come to an understanding of who Jesus is.

Yes, this passage is about a person who is deaf and mute rather than being blind, but It is about having our spiritual sight restored; having our spiritual eyes opened.

It is in this sense that I hope by the end of this message you can say,
"I can see clearly now."

So let's look at the detail of the story and see how it shows us both the simple compassion of Jesus but also let us see how it answers the deeper question of the identity of Jesus.

The story takes place in the region of the Decapolis. This was a grouping of 10 cities on the east side of the sea of Galilee in what was Gentile territory. Jesus has been here once before back in Mark 5 where we read that very dramatic story of Jesus healing the Demoniac by sending the demons into a herd of pigs who promptly raced down over a steep bank into a lake and were drowned. On that occasion the very fact that it was a herd of pigs should alert us to the fact that this is not Jewish territory.

The story we have before us is somewhat less dramatic. In fact Jesus wants to keep it as low key as possible by taking the man aside from the crowd in order to perform the healing. This may have been in order

- to be free of distraction,
- to maintain the man's dignity, or
- maybe simply to keep the healing quiet as Jesus goes on to say at the end not to tell anyone.

We are not told the reason, but certainly I can understand, I wouldn't want my consultation with my doctor to be conducted in the public square.

We should note in v32 that it was some friends who brought this man to Jesus. It was the friends who begged Jesus to place his hand on him. What a wonderful act of care and concern.

The simple application is obvious - do we have the same love for and connection with our friends that we want to bring them to Jesus.

- Do they need to understand that Jesus is concerned about the ordinary things of their lives?
- Do they need to understand the extraordinariness of Jesus as Messiah God's anointed one?

Nowhere do we get an indication of this man's attitude to Jesus; the emphasis is on the obvious faith of the friends. Jesus acts on the faith of the friends.

There is a great appeal to the senses in the way Jesus conducts this healing.

- In verse 33 we read Jesus places his fingers into the man's ears.
- He spits, we can assume on his hand, and then touches the man's tongue.
- And then thirdly there is this deep sigh - I would presume of compassion

Jesus speaks the word Ephphatha. This is an Aramaic word which means 'Be opened!'

So with these three simple actions

- touch,
- spit and touch, and
- the spoken word;

the man is healed.

There is nothing gradual in this healing as in some others, the man's ears are opened and he begins to speak plainly. It's not as if he has to hear others speaking before he can start to form the words again in his own mouth. It's not as if the muscles of his mouth and tongue have to learn how to make sounds again. Mark wants us to be aware this is an absolute miracle which suspends all the normal physical expectations. We see here Jesus complete authority over illness and disability. Jesus is truly doing something quite spectacular.

Who is this man?

The story ends as many of Jesus stories end and especially in Mark with Jesus telling those present not to tell anyone. It would seem that Jesus must have spent a few days here with these folk because the indication is that he told them more than once and the more he told them the more they kept talking about it. We read in verse 37 that the people were overwhelmed with amazement.

And why wouldn't you be. I'm sure if we were there we would be amazed and we would be saying exactly what they said, *"He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak."*

Why did Jesus not want the word to get out? Some had speculated that he did want it to get out and he was using reverse psychology. Tell someone not to do something and then they can't resist! That is always a possibility, but I think the more likely explanation is what has been called the '*Messianic secret*' in Mark which is about Jesus keeping his identity ambiguous for possibly a number of reasons.

Firstly, he didn't want to raise the attention of the Roman authorities too early before he had time to do all that he wanted to do.

Secondly, if people knew he was the Messiah it would be certain that they would have had a very misplaced view of who the Messiah was and how he would bring in the Kingdom. Only after Jesus death

and resurrection and the receiving of the Holy Spirit could people possibly begin to understand God's plan of salvation through his Messiah. So at this point Jesus is wanting to keep his identity a secret.

One little phrase that the people use which is very telling is in verse 37, *"He has done everything well."* This is possibly pointing to his perfect humanity. It indicates that in every situation Jesus seems to know exactly what is required and brings to the situation what is needed without any fuss or bother.

Last week we saw how he interacted with the Syrophoenician woman so masterfully to draw out of her the humility of faith. On that occasion he showed a reluctance to heal, yet how appropriate when we see what it drew out of that woman. This week we've seen how Jesus heals immediately which is appropriate to this deaf man's situation. He does everything well.

Next week we will see how he has compassion on a crowd of 4,000 and feeds them.

In this series we will also see how he heals a blind man.

He does everything well.

So Jesus is not just morally perfect; He is perfect in wisdom, truth and compassion. He does everything well.

So who is this man? That is the deeper question that begs to be answered. That is the underlying theme for Mark. This is just one more story, one more piece of the puzzle helping us to answer that question.

Of course we don't have to look far to find an answer. Mark gives the game away right at the beginning of his gospel. Chapter one verse one, *"The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the son of God."*

In a few weeks time we will come to Chapter 8 and verse 27. This is about halfway through Jesus public ministry where he draws his disciples aside at Caesarea Philippi and asks them *"Who do people say that I am?"* And then more directly says to his disciples, *"Who do you say I am?"* At that point Jesus will have been with them long enough for them hopefully to have got it.

- They would have seen enough healings like this one.
- They will have seen enough miracles like walking on water and feeding great crowds.
- They will have heard enough parables and other teaching to have formed an opinion about who Jesus is.

In Mark chapter 8 verse 29 Peter is the one who answers the question, *"You are the Messiah."* Other people are saying that Jesus is John the Baptist or maybe Elijah or maybe one of the other prophets but Jesus closest followers as represented by Peter are actually starting to get it.

I say, 'starting to get it' because what follows makes it clear that Peter doesn't really understand the role of the Messiah. I mean a Messiah going to the cross and rising on the third day just doesn't figure in Peter's idea of the Kingdom of God. For Peter, the kingdom is where God reigns victorious over all his enemies. The cross is about being defeated by your enemies.

Of course, if Peter and the other disciples truly knew their prophets and especially the prophet Isaiah, they would know that the Messiah is a suffering servant.

The healing of the deaf and mute man is a simple act of compassion, yes, but it is also a fulfilment of prophecy. Isaiah 35:5,6 says, *"Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame leap like a deer and the mute tongue shout for joy."*

The new age that is coming, which is to be introduced by the Messiah, will be a time when all disease is healed, all disability banished. All that is wrong with our world will be put right.

Isaiah used the image of water gushing forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert. At the end of Chapter 35 he says, *"The redeemed will enter Zion with singing; Everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away."*

So what Jesus is doing in the healing of this deaf and mute man is pointing to himself as the Messiah introducing the Kingdom of God. In this Kingdom there will be no more sickness or disability. There will be gladness and joy, and complete human fulfilment knowing Jesus as King in his Kingdom.

The obvious question then of course is, if Jesus has come why is there still sickness and suffering in our world? The simple answer is that Jesus coming is in two parts. At his first coming he introduced the Kingdom and gave us a foretaste through all we read in the New Testament.

At his second coming the Kingdom will be consummated and the prophecies in Isaiah will be completely fulfilled.

We wait for and long for Christ's return. In the meantime, we work with God to bring in the Kingdom.

I want to leave you this morning with this question,

Where do you look for hope?

For many people the answer to this question is science.

It is science that will find the cure for various diseases.
It is science that will cure disability.

Now of course we should support scientific research and seek cures for sickness. God has given us intellects to understand the universe and how it works and to fix problems. Much has been achieved through medical science, but there are still huge gaps in our knowledge and further work to be done. COVID-19 has certainly shown us that we're not as smart as we thought we were and we are just as vulnerable to pandemics as people in past generations.

I believe God wants us to understand more about how the universe works and bring solutions to the problems of our day. But we are very foolish if that is where we put our ultimate hope.

Some scientists think we can reverse the ageing process and beat death and therefore don't need God. Well what foolish thinking!

We work hard to achieve Kingdom outcomes now, but we ultimately know only God can bring in the Kingdom and that complete physical healing and well-being will only be known then.

Most importantly we know that our need is much bigger than what medical help can provide; our need is to have our sins forgiven and be reconciled to God and to one another.

When we get to Chapter 8 of Mark, in this series, we will see Jesus giving some very clear teaching on this; in fact we will discover this is the central reason Jesus came - to die on the cross for our sins and to rise on the third day to conquer death and inaugurate the new creation. Only in this new creation will we have whole bodies, resurrection bodies no longer prone to sickness.

So my friends this is where we have to place our hope. Putting our ultimate hope anywhere else is building ourselves up for sure disappointment.

Jesus brings hope.

Jesus brings hope in the midst of the ordinariness of life. Jesus lived our life and moved amongst ordinary people like you and me, people who get sick, who have disability, get depressed, worry about the future, maybe lose our faith but people who also find faith. Jesus wants to walk with us through life and bring both the comfort and challenge of the Gospel.

Ultimately our hope has to be in understanding who Jesus truly is. He is the Messiah who is bringing in a Kingdom and he is enlisting people who will join him in this great project.

Faith means being able to say, yes I can see this clearly now. Yes I want to join Jesus mission. Yes I want to be a disciple.

These early disciples brought their friend in need to Jesus.

They couldn't stop talking about Jesus. This is what it means to see clearly. To be actually doing the work of a disciple.

Put your faith in Jesus and join in his great Kingdom project.