

The Twelfth Sunday after Trinity  
Mark 7:31-37

There is confusion today over the idea of “ministry” in the church today. The historic understanding of the church is that God sets aside men to fill the office of pastor to proclaim His Word and administer His visible Word which is His Sacraments. All who receive this Word He gives the right to become children of God when and where the Holy Spirit wills. (John 1:12-13, 3:8) These children of God enter into the priesthood of all believers of which we are all members. There is no distinction. But there is a distinction between the priesthood of all believers and those particular priests who are set aside to publicly administer God’s Word as pastors. When this distinction gets muddled confusion arises.

We see this in two ways in the church and even in our own district. First, men called deacons, who have no rightly ordered call are serving as pastors in Word and Sacrament ministry. This obscures the actual office of the ministry. Men in the office of the ministry are not special in and of themselves. We are sinners just like you in need of the forgiveness of sins found in Word and Sacrament. The *office* of the ministry, however, is special. It is not filled by deacons or elders or leaders of the church, but by men who have been trained, examined, and called by the church. Second, ministry has been generalized to mean any kind of service to God. It no longer means preaching, or teaching, and the administration of the Sacraments. But coffee service, or choir, or kids, or parking attendants get turned into a “ministry.” Serving your neighbor in love is no longer sufficient, but it must be turned into some kind of special ministry or mission for God. It’s as if receiving forgiveness of sins through the proper ministry of Word and Sacrament is no longer enough.

The Gospel lesson today shows us what true ministry looks like. In short, people who have heard the Good News that Jesus heals sinners bring their friend to Jesus and He heals him. How does our text begin?

*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.*

The report of Jesus had gone out to the regions of Tyre and Sidon and the Decapolis and many believed in Him. Some brought to Jesus a man who was deaf and mute. They knew that if Jesus laid His hand on their friend, he would be healed.

You are to do the same thing. You are to bring those who are hurting because of sin to Jesus to be touched by Him. Now it is true that Jesus is everywhere because He is God. As Jeremiah testifies: "Can a man hide himself in a secret place so that I cannot see him? declares the LORD. Do I not fill heaven and earth? declares the LORD." (Jeremiah 23:24) But Jesus doesn't promise to lay His hand on you just anywhere. He says, "where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among you." (Matthew 18:20) Here Jesus isn't talking about small groups that have become so popular today, but the church which is the gathering of the saints. That's why we start the Divine Service, "In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen." Jesus also promises to the 72 that were sent out to preach in His name, now known as pastors, "The one who hears you hears me, and the one who rejects you rejects me." (Luke 10:16) He promises that you were buried with Him in Baptism. (Romans 6:4) He promises you that "this is my body." (Matthew 26:26, Mark 14:22, Luke 22:19, 1 Corinthians 11:24)

The deaf and mute man had an advantage that those you come in contact do not have. He knew he had a problem. He knew he was a sinner. He bore the price of sin in his body personally. It may not have been a particular sin he committed, but it was the effect of a creation broken by sin. Death is not natural, as the Eastern mystic would have you believe, but it is the wages of sin. (Romans 6:23)

Many of those that you come into contact with believe people are basically good and that they have no issues with God. If Jesus is just another way to live a better life, I can just get a life coach... I don't need Jesus! Even worse, people can live in open unrepentant sin and think they're a Christian! They may even be as crass to think, "Jesus loves forgiving and I love sinning so it's a great relationship!" "Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By now means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?" (Romans 6:1-2) Your sin grieves God. My sin grieves God. I believe this is part of the reason Jesus sighs. Our Gospel reading continues:

*And taking him aside from the crowd privately, He put his fingers into his ears, and after spitting touched his tongue. And looking up to heaven, He sighed and said to him, "Ephphatha," that is, "Be opened." And his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly.*

Jesus is moved by our plight because of sin. This is what motivated Him to take on Human flesh, suffer, and die for us on the cross. Jesus loved this deaf mute man. He touches his ears and tongue to show what He is going to do and He looks up to heaven to show from where the healing comes. He loves you. He left us His Word which is how He wants us to get to know Him and He ascended into heaven to show us where we will be going when we follow Him. We are born spiritually deaf and mute. He must open our ears so that we hear His Word and believe.

The ears and the tongue are the organs of faith. With the ears we hear the word of God and believe. With the tongue we confess that same Word of God. As Paul says, "For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved." (Romans 10:10)

The pastor and layman doesn't confess his own word. That won't help anyone. We must confess Christ. Luther says it beautifully in the Smalcald Articles which are in our confessions:

“The first and chief article is this: Jesus Christ, our God and Lord, died for our sins and was raised again for our justification. He alone is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, and God has laid upon Him the iniquities of us all. All have sinned and are justified freely, without their own works or merits, by His grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, in His blood. This is necessary to believe. This cannot be otherwise acquired or grasped by any work, law, or merit.” (SA.2.I.1-4)

Just as Jesus alone could heal this deaf and mute man, He is the only one that can heal you. He alone is the only one that can heal your neighbor. This healing is given to us freely by grace and we grasp it through faith alone. We bring our neighbor to Jesus where He has promised to be for the forgiveness of sins so that our neighbor might be healed the same way that we are.

We confess the same thing as the crowd in our Gospel reading:

*He has done all things well. He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak.*

Jesus does all things well. He lived a righteous life and therefore is the spotless lamb that paid the price for all sin with His bloody sacrifice. He won the forgiveness of sins for all men. He distributes that forgiveness in specific means through His church. He has ordained some men to be administrators of these means. All of us become recipients of His wonderful grace. When the office of the ministry and priesthood of all believers are kept distinct, it is much more clear where Jesus can be found and that’s exactly where He has promised to be.

What about other so-called ministries? Look around you. There are people around you in the world that are suffering and hurting due to the ravages of sin. You know what they need!

Bring them to Jesus!