Ephphatha (Be Opened)

Mark 7:24-37

Key Verse: 7;34 “He looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him, “Ephphatha!” (which means “Be opened!”)

Last week, Jesus taught us that what really defiles us is not what goes into our stomach, but what comes out from our heart, such as evil thoughts and words. In order to cleanse our heart, we confess our sins and ask for the forgiveness of sin. Then we live by the Holy Spirit, not by our sinful fleshly desire. (Gal 5:16) In today’s passage Jesus’ healing ministry continues. Jesus heals two people: a daughter of a Syrophoenician woman and a deaf and mute man. I pray that Jesus may heal us from whatever disease we have while listening to this message. Amen!

First, for such a reply. (24-30) After defending his disciples from the Pharisees and some of the teachers of the law, Jesus left Galilee and went to the vicinity of Tyre. Tyre is a port city by the Mediterranean Sea, located northwest from Galilee. Jews and Greek-speaking gentiles lived together. Jesus entered a house and did not want anyone to know it. Jesus wanted to have personal time for himself and with his disciples apart from the crowd. But his plan didn’t work. He couldn’t keep his presence secret. In fact, as soon as a woman whose little daughter was possessed by an impure spirit heard about Jesus, she came and fell at his feet. (25) The Bible says that she was a Greek, born in Syrian Phoenicia. She was a gentile woman. According to Jewish customs she should not contact the Jewish rabbi. But she came to Jesus and begged him to drive the demon out of her daughter. (26)

How did Jesus reply? Look at verse 27. “***First let the children eat all they want,” he told her, “for it is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to the dogs***.” Jesus’ words sounded rude and cruel to this poor woman. Here Jesus called his people, the Jews, ‘children’ and the gentiles, including this woman, ‘dogs’. In any and every situation whatsoever the reason and wherever we are, being called ‘dog’ is a great contempt and an act of humiliation. People must have replied to a Jew with harsh words in great anger. “Right, if I am a gentile dog, you are a Jewish pig!” What was this woman’s response? To our surprise she accepted Jesus’ words. She said, “***Lord, even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs***.” (28) She admitted herself as a dog. Missionary James Lee raised a dog which barked at me whenever I visited his house. The dog would always try to bite me if I put my foot even an inch inside. But, when I ate something on the table, her attitude suddenly changed. She became very quiet and humble. The dog wanted to eat something from me under the table, even some crumbs or leftover food. She often saw me with her most pitiful look to draw my attention. The woman in this story knew well what Jesus had meant. She knew that she did not deserve Jesus' mercy because she was a gentile woman. But she didn’t mind what Jesus said to her if only her daughter could be healed. She was ready to endure all contempt or humiliation, even sacrifice her life for the sake of her daughter. This is the power of love. There is no fear in love. Perfect love casts out fear. (1 Jn 4:18)

What was Jesus’ answer for her? Look at verse 29. “***Then he told her, “For such a reply, you may go; the demon has left your daughter***.” What does “such a reply” mean? What kind of reply moved Jesus’ heart? There are not many things which move Jesus’ heart. Nicodemus’ great knowledge didn’t move Jesus. The mission report of his disciples didn’t move his heart. The majesty and beauty of the temple didn’t move Jesus’ heart. But this gentile woman’s genuine compassion and humble heart moved Jesus’ heart. The Bible says that God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble. (1 Pe 5:5) She humbled herself for the sake of her daughter. She didn’t mind being humiliated by being called a gentile dog. Her motherly sacrificial love moved the heart of Jesus. Such a humble and compassionate reply brought her sick daughter a new life in Christ.

The children’s crumbs are God’s mercy. I want to see *such a reply* among us. We all want to see such a reply for our children, for our family members, for our church, community, and nation. Where can we find ‘such a reply’ in our generation? When we humble ourselves and seek God's mercy, God will find such a reply from us. If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land. (2 Chro7:14) Amen!

Second, *Ephphatha* (Be opened)!” Jesus’ mission trip for the gentile area continued. He left the vicinity of Tyre and went through Sidon, down to the Sea of Galilee and into the region of the Decapolis. (31) Decapolis was the place where Jesus drove out impure spirits and healed a man in chapter 6. **There some people brought to him a man who was deaf and could hardly talk, and they begged Jesus to place his hand on him**. (32) The people must have heard about Jesus through the converted demon-possessed man who had testified about what Jesus had done for him. (6:20) In fact, hearing and talking are somewhat related. This man barely talked because he couldn’t listen at all. How did Jesus help this man? Look at verses 33-35. “***After he took him aside, away from the crowd, Jesus put his fingers into the man’s ears. Then he spit and touched the man’s tongue. He looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh to him, “Ephphatha.” (which means, “Be opened!) At this, the man’s ears were opened, his tongue was loosened and he began to speak plainly.***” The way Jesus healed this man was unique and different from what he had done before. He could have just said the words, “Be healed!” or “Be opened!” as he did for a blind man and lepers. But this time, he put his fingers into the man’s ears, spit and touched the man’s tongue. Why? Why did Jesus choose such an unhygienic way to heal this deaf and mute man? Someone said that this man couldn’t hear Jesus’ spitting, still he saw all the process of Jesus’ treatment. Jesus tested his faith. Jesus tested whether he really trusted in him or not. Jesus also touched this man’s ears and tongue so that he could receive Jesus’ touching love. Touching love is special. When we touch and are touched, we feel special. We feel loved, protected, and close. Jesus taught the man that he was special for Jesus. This deaf and mute man thought that he himself was useless. He couldn’t hear and talk, so he couldn’t communicate with others properly. He couldn’t express his ideas and thoughts to others. If someone was laughing behind him, he thought that they were laughing at him. So, he often fought with others. People avoided him when he tried to say something. He thought that he became a burden to others. He suffered from low self-esteem and lack of confidence in his life. But Jesus didn’t think so. Jesus saw him as a precious child of God who was created in God’s image. Jesus believed that this man could start a new life after his ears are opened and his mouth is loosened. Jesus had compassion on him and hope on his life. Jesus touched this man so that he might restore hope and confidence in his life.

Jesus looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh and said to him, “*Ephphatha*!” (which means “Be opened!”) Jesus prayed to God and put his breath into this man by saying, “*Ephphatha*”. This reminds us of God’s creation of man by breathing into his nostrils the breath of life who became a living being in Genesis. (Ge 2:7) Jesus gave his new life to him, and said, “Be opened”, as he said “Let there be light!” in the beginning. What happened to this man when Jesus said, “*Ephphatha*”? The man’s ears were opened and his tongue was loosened and he began to speak plainly. (35) What were his first words supposed to be? “Thank you! Jesus” “Praise the Lord!”

Jesus commanded them not to tell anyone. Jesus thought that it was not the right time for him to be glorified. But the more he did so, the more they kept talking about it. Look at verse 37. “***People were overwhelmed with amazement. “He has done everything well,” they said. “He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak***.” There are some spiritually deaf and mute people. Even though they have ears and mouth, they can’t hear and speak the word of God. Something blocks their ears and grips their tongues. These are fear, doubt, and pride. I earnestly pray that God may open their ears and mouth in the name of Jesus Christ. People said about Jesus, “*He has done everything well*.” Jesus, who opened the ear and mouth of the man, opened the gate of heaven. Jesus opened the gate of heaven through his death and resurrection. The way to heaven for sinners was blocked because of their sins. But the way to heaven was wide open as the tomb of Jesus was wide opened. Jesus did everything well. Now Jesus who opened the way to heaven opens the way for our eternal life, the way for blessing, the way for success, the way for a green card, the way for medical school, the way for relationship, and the way for the throne of God. Thank you, Jesus and praise his holy name! Amen!

While meditating this passage, I learned that God likes to open. God opened the Garden of Eden and brought men into paradise. But Satan likes to close and put them into darkness. When God opened, new history started. When God opened the door of the ark of Noah, new human history started. When God opened Sarah’s womb, new history started. When God opened the Red Sea and the door of Jericho, miracles happened in human history. When God opened the tomb of Jesus, the way to heaven was opened. When God opened the heaven and poured out the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, new world started. Now Jesus wants us to open our hearts. In Revelation 3:20 Jesus said, “Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone who hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person; and they with me.” Open your heart and invite Jesus Christ into your life, and new life will begin with him*! Ephphatha*! Amen!