

THE TWELFTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Study Notes for the Christian Layperson

by: Rev. Marcus Baikie



Mark 7:31-37 ESV

Author and Date:

The Holy Spirit caused John Mark to write the words of this Gospel around AD 50-60. This text takes place during Jesus' ministry, after the healing of the Syrophenician woman's daughter (7:24-30) and before the feeding of the 4000 in the wilderness (8:1-10). The account of this miracle is only found in Mark's Gospel, though Matthew writes in general of Jesus healing "the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute, and many others" between his accounts of the healing of the woman's daughter and the feeding of the 4000 (15:29-31).

³¹ Then [Jesus] returned from the region of Tyre and went through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis.

- The Decapolis was ten cities of Greek and Roman culture, east of the Jordan River and southeast of the Sea of Galilee, in an otherwise Semitic region.
- "Then" – literally "And again". This may refer back to Mark 5:1-20. Jesus healed a man with an unclean spirit in the region of the Gerasenes. He sent the demon (named "Legion", for they were many) into a herd of pigs. When the former demoniac was found by the townspeople to be healed, they were afraid and begged Jesus to depart from their region.

The man, however, went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him. Thus the testimony of the man healed by Christ bore fruit. Faith was created through the Word, and so those who heard of Jesus brought another man to Him to be healed.

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.

- Though it is not explicitly stated in the text, the fact that this man had a speech impediment implies that he had been deaf since birth.
- ³³ And taking him aside from the crowd privately, he put his fingers into his ears, and after spitting touched his tongue.
- Jesus takes this man away from the crowd to Himself in order to avoid any misconceptions about the purpose of His coming. As He will soon teach His disciples, "the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again." (Mark 8:31) Nothing, not even the spread of His power to heal, could be permitted to keep Him from the cross.
- This act of Jesus testifies to His incarnation in human flesh. He did not remain in heaven to

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heal from afar, but came to earth with flesh and bone fingers that could be put into ears and saliva glands and tongue that could spit. Perhaps He used these physical acts to teach the man what He was about to do, since, being deaf, he would not be able to hear Jesus' speak.

- Christ continues to work through physical means today, as He forgives through water in Holy Baptism and bread and wine in the Sacrament of the Altar.

³⁴ **And looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, “Ephphatha,” that is, “Be opened.”**

- Jesus sighed as an expression of His compassion for this poor man. He is moved by his condition. This is characteristic of Mark's Gospel, who often writes of Jesus' emotions (see Mark 1:41, 3:5, 10:14, 10:21, 14:33).
- “Ephphatha” is an Aramaic word that Mark translated into Greek. This word was used in early Christian baptismal liturgies, as the Holy Spirit, through the Word, opened the baptized's ears to hear God's Word and mouth to confess Jesus Christ as Lord. Consider also the opening versicles in the offices of Matins and Vespers, from Psalm 51:15: “O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare Your praise.”
- Thus Jesus did not simply act, but spoke. The miracle of healing was accomplished through the Word, accompanied by physical action. Consider the Small Catechism: “How can water do such great things? Certainly not just water, but the word of God in and with the water does these things...” and “How can bodily eating and drinking do such great things? Certainly not just eating and drinking do these things, but the words written here: ‘Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.’”

³⁵ **And his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly.**

- “Plainly” – literally “rightly” (*orthos*). Having had his tongue released by Jesus, the man was now able to speak rightly. So also we, whose lips are opened by the Lord, now confess and praise Him rightly (orthodoxy).

³⁶ **And Jesus charged them to tell no one. But the more he charged them, the more zealously they proclaimed it.**

- Again, Jesus charges them with secrecy lest He be kept from His ultimate purpose: suffering and dying on the cross. Now that Christ has died and is risen and ascended, the Good News of Jesus Christ is to be proclaimed to all nations (Matthew 28:18-20), for it is only through the hearing of the Gospel that “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” (Romans 10:8-17)

³⁷ **And they were astonished beyond measure, saying, “He has done all things well. He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak.”**

- “He has done all things well” – could also be translated “made all things well”. This summarizes all of Jesus' work, and especially His death and resurrection. By His blood we are made well unto everlasting life.
- Thus the words of the Old Testament reading from Isaiah 24 are fulfilled in Christ. The ears of the deaf man were opened to hear the words of a book (that is, the Scriptures), and the people who witnessed it “sanctify the Holy One of Jacob and...stand in awe of the God of Israel.” (Isaiah 24:18, 23)



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