

Pentecost 16 B, September 8, 2024

A chance to hear

Mark 7:24 – 37 and/or memorize: Mark 7: 37 NLT

Three retirees, each with hearing loss were taking a walk on fine March day. One of them remarked to the other, "windy, ain't it?" "No," the second man replied, "it's Thursday." The third man chimed in, "yeah, so am I, let's stop and get a Coke. "

We can laugh at that, but most of us have some problems with hearing. Some are physical; some of them are selective listening; some are that we're distracted and not paying attention or it may just be that the noises around us prevent us from hearing. Whichever it might be, hearing is one of our essential senses and the one that can often lead to misunderstandings between people.

Jesus has already been in conflict with the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law for His disrespect of the traditions. He is about to open up a bigger can of worms in the two miracles he performs in our Gospel reading. The odd thing about this is Jesus has left Israel and entered gentile lands, where he naturally runs into gentiles.

In a sense, the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law are 100% correct that Jesus is breaking all the traditions. At the same time, they are 100% wrong because they have departed from the commands of God. Jesus came to restore the plan His Father had at the very beginning of creation, that all creation, including all people would be included in His plan. The Jewish traditions were man-made traditions and in direct disobedience of God's plan.

In the first miracle, we hear about a woman, a gentile woman, who comes to ask for help from Jesus by, falling at His feet: asking Him to heal her daughter of a demon. The gentile woman, and the needs of the daughter meant nothing to the Jews. Jesus response to her is really a reflection of how the religious leaders would feel about her and answer her call for help. That she, and her daughter were on a par with the dogs and undeserving of help.

Mark tells us she comes because she has heard about Jesus. Her persistence and acceptance that she might not be counted among God's people is astounding. What she asks is for consideration, not to take from those God has chosen, but to just receive a little grace as a gift. She receives that grace because of her persistence and trust in Jesus.

The Jews would see the man's deafness as a sign of some terrible sin against God, for which he is being punished. Because he makes some sounds it means that he was not deaf from birth, but was cursed by God for his sin. There is one other thing we learn from this text. The

woman comes from the poor parts of a town; the deaf man lives in one of the most luxurious. These two miracles remind us that Jesus came for all, both the poor and the rich.

I came across a story about a Native American, a member of the Cherokee tribe, who was in downtown New York, visiting with a friend who lived in the city. As they were walking along, all of a sudden the Native American stopped and said, "I hear a cricket." His friend replied, "Oh, you're crazy." "No, I hear a cricket. I do! I'm sure of it," he said.

New Yorker said, "it's noon. There are people everywhere, headed to lunch, cars are honking, taxi' squealing, there's all the noise from the city. Surely, you can't hear a cricket above all that."

The Native American said, "Well, I'm sure I heard a cricket." So, he listened attentively and then walked about 10 feet to the corner where there was a shrub in a large cement planter. He dug beneath the leaves and found the cricket. His friend was astounded. But the Cherokee said, "My ears are no different from yours. It simply depends on what you're used to listening to.

Here let me show you what I mean." He reached into his pocket, pulled out a handful of change, a few quarters, dimes, nickels, and pennies. He dropped them on the concrete sidewalk. All around him, even from a distance, heads turned. "You see what I mean?" It all depends on what you're used to listening for." What are you used to listening for?

Jesus wants us to listen to his voice *over the noise of the crowd*. That's why he came so that we would know that God truly cares about us. He sent His Son into our world, so that we would hear that message directly from Him. God wants us to listen to His Son's voice over everything else in the world. Unfortunately, that's very difficult to do because the noise of the world is so tempting to us and gets so loud.

There's a legend that says after the fall, after Adam and Eve left the garden, they had a hard time believing God still loved them. They had disappointed God, something fierce. They realized they been duped by the serpent, who, although punished to crawl on his belly for all of eternity, still left laughing, at the plight of Adam and Eve.

God saw the anguish that was taking place in the hearts and souls of Adam and Eve, and it broke His heart. He grieved for the lost innocence of His children. Not only that, God feared for the love and faith of His future children. If they didn't know the love of God and let it live in their hearts, they would perish, also. And so, would all of Creation.

One day, during a regular staff meeting with God's leading angels, they noticed that God seemed distracted. So, the Angel of Love, the Angel of Mercy and the Angel of Grace asked God what was wrong. God let out a sigh of despair so deep it brought tears to the eyes of every angel in heaven.

Then, many of those tears began to fall. God looked at the angels of love, mercy and grace, and devised a plan. A plan so wonderful that the tears of the angels never made it to earth. They froze in the darkness of space and, shone like diamonds, where they hang there to this day. We call them the stars at night. The stars reflect the light and love of God, who sits upon the throne of heaven.

That's a wonderful story, but it's not the end of the story. It was really just the beginning. God's plan was that at birth, a guardian angel would be assigned to every child. Their job was quite simple: all they had to do was whisper in the ears of babies every moment of every day, this wonderful message: "God loves you. God loves you.

Perhaps, you've experienced this, when a baby is alone, with no parents or other children around, you might hear them giggle or coo for no apparent reason? That's because their guardian angel has been whispering God's love into their ear. That worked for a long, long time. People listened and knew God's love.

But there came a time when the world got noisier. At first, it was just the noise of everyday work, hammering, sawing, the noise of the butter churn, the sound of the hoe in the garden, and the lowing of cattle and sheep. The whispering of the guardian angels could still be heard even over that noise.

But then, as humans and technology developed, the noise of the world got louder. More noise filled the world, people began to get distracted and became unfocused. Many of them were no longer hearing the words of the guardian angels: "God loves you God loves you."

Then it got even worse. Radio, television, cell phones, satellite radio and the Internet brought the noise to every corner of the world. Pretty soon the airways were filled with all kinds of noise. Fewer and fewer people were listening to the words of the guardian angels: "God loves you. God loves you."

Although the noise level continued to grow, the guardian angels did not give up on the jobs God had assigned them. They still whispered God's love into our ears so our hearts would know: "God loves you. God loves you." They never failed in their duty. They got discouraged because we didn't listen or the noise of the world got too loud. But they never stopped whispering: "God loves you. God loves you."

The good news is that you can still hear the whisper of your guardian angels: "God loves you. God loves you." You can still hear the healing words that you are not alone, nor do you face life, and the problems of life alone. God has not abandoned you. He has promised he will never abandon you. God promises that he will always love you, despite your sins and imperfections. The question is, will you stop and listen.

Will remember what Jesus did not just as an event, but as His work of personal salvation for you? Will you stop and listen as you face the difficulties of life? Will you remember the message of your guardian angel: "God loves you. God love you." When you remember it, you are becoming exactly what God wants you to be: an "Everyday Disciple, Sharing Christ, Changing Lives!"

When we share Jesus' love with others, it is the greatest gift we can give, and it fulfills God's plan. That's when we are truly "Everyday Disciples, Sharing Christ, Changing Lives!" for Jesus, for we will be obedient to God's plan.

Count me in: What will you do to show that God's love is for everyone?