

Trinity 12, 2013

Mark 7:31-37ⁱ

Part I

Music technology had changed over the years. Today you buy, store and play music on something as small as a smart phone. Thousands of songs can literally be stored in them. It's really quite amazing how much they can hold. It was different yesterday. Yesterday music was stored on a black vinyl record the size of a plate. It could hold maybe two dozen songs; twelve on a side. The songs they typically played were "oldies;" songs from the 50's and 60's.

Sometimes those records got scratched. The scratch prevented the needle that played them from advancing. The needle would play the same line over and over. It became a broken record.

In a way it was like that for the deaf mute. The deaf mute could not have heard the music though he saw the record turn on the turntable; could not have heard your voice though he saw your lips move to the music.

It's not how God meant it to be, that's for sure. When God created the world everything was perfect. There was not a scratch in it; it was not a broken record. In fact, God said about the world he created, "It was very goodⁱⁱ" It was paradise...Then sin entered. Man fell into sin and sin made its imprint. Man's infirmity – like that of the deaf mute – is a case in point. His *infirmity* said this is a broken world.

Think of some examples of how we live in a broken world. The last two weeks we have had lots of activity at Saved By Grace with the Basketball Camp and Vacation Bible School. Every now and then a child fell and scraped his knee on the playground. The scrapes stung. The whole body was racked with pain. You could see it in the wincing faces and streaming tears. The *tears* said it is a broken world.

Neither you children nor we adults are immune to infirmity. Our bodies get sick and achy. We run fevers and our heads throb. Our bodies wear down; and the older they get the longer it takes to heal. The years pile up and the breaks, tears and injuries add up. Injuries and infirmities from our younger years come back to give us pain. We have to face the truth. We're not getting any younger. To be sure, *sickness* says we live in a broken world.

Our minds have their infirmities, too. They do because we often have misperceptions about ourselves; misperceptions that lead to anxieties. Such perceptions limit us. They are like a barrier that closes us in. We want to break out of them, but the barrier in the mind is too strong. We try; try; and try, but no matter how hard we try, the mind gets the best of us. The *mind*, with its anxieties, says we live in a broken world.

Other times we feel hurt. We feel hurt from our own actions. They are sins that we do to ourselves. We feel hurt from actions of others. They are sins done against us...and hurt breaks our hearts. They ache from the hurt. The ache can be profound. *Aching hearts* say we live in a broken world.

Part II

Now man looks at this broken world and thinks he can do something about it. He thinks he can solve the sin that made its imprint on the world. He believes that he has it in him to fix what is broken.

We learned this at Vacation Bible School this week. Man sings his own song, if you will. He brags about himself. He boasts in his own ability. So he sings, "God does his part, I do mine; If I don't my faith won't shine.ⁱⁱⁱ" This kind of bragging puts the burden on us. The burden is on us to fix what is broken.

Man can sing this song all he wants. To be sure, it's a song he sings because he has stopped his ears. He doesn't want to hear that sin has fully ruined man; that man can't do anything about it; that man's sin is offensive to God. In this way, man is like a little child that gets in trouble. When his dad calls him on it, the child doesn't want to hear it. The child puts his hands up to his ears as if to stop them. He objects, "Don't tell me that!"

So man sings his own song. He boasts in his own ability. Though he does, it sounds like mumbling to God. No matter how hard man mumbles his old worn out song, it won't work. He's like the deaf mute. There was nothing he could do to fix his condition. He couldn't wish himself better; couldn't do his part; no one could get him new ears and tongue. He was helpless. It all serves to *highlight* that man is helpless in a broken world.

Part III

That's where Jesus enters. To begin with, Jesus has a heart for the deaf mute. He pulls him aside from the crowd. He does to get his attention. When Jesus has his attention, he does a series actions – one right after the other. Each action – the touching of the deaf mutes' ears, the spitting in his own hand, the touching of the deaf mutes' tongue, the looking up to heaven, the sighing – each action was sign language.

The final action – the sigh – was the exclamation point. People sigh for different reasons. They sigh from relief. "It's been a long year. I'm glad it's over." They sigh from weariness. "I'm on demand all the time. There seems to be no end in sight." They sigh from sorrow. "The pain hurts. It saddens me." *That's* what Jesus sighed from. He sighed from *sorrow*. He sees the deaf mute stuck in a broken world; and he feels pain for people broken by sin.

So much so that Jesus did something about it. Jesus shows us that when he put his finger on the deaf mutes' tongue and in his ears. It was *as if* he were absorbing all infirmity and the cause of it – our sin – in his body. That's what the Bible means when it says, "Surely, he has borne our infirmities and carried our sorrows.^{iv}" Taking our sin as his own on the cross, he took it away from us. When he did, he felt pain. He felt the pain of hell in your place. Then, he cried out in a loud voice and bowed his head and died. It was *God's* exclamation point; *God's* great *sigh*.

Part IV

No sooner did Jesus sigh in our text, than he spoke the word, "Ephatha!" "Be open!" There was power in Jesus' word. He spoke; and it happened. For the first time, the deaf mute could hear. Before he could only see lips move, now he hears the words that fall from those lips. Before he could only see the record turn on the turn table, if you will, now he hears the notes of music played from it. His broken world of silence was turned to sound; and *just like that*, at Jesus' word.

The point is Jesus' word is powerful. He speaks his word and it happens. He says, "You are forgiven," and you are. The hymn we sang says God "bespeaks you righteous,"^v and you are. With that same word, God, at the same time, opens your heart to hear. When he does, he creates you anew. He creates you anew in Christ Jesus.

Created anew we are reminded of paradise. That's where the healing of the deaf mute takes us. It takes us *back* to the paradise God created; to when "everything was good." At the same time, it points us *forward* to the last great day; to when Jesus will fix this broken world. What a miracle that day will be!

Part V

In today's miracle, Jesus also loosed the deaf mutes' tongue. He needed no speech therapist. He did not have to practice long hours. There was no mimicking; no striving; no straining. Just like that, he spoke clearly, crisply, and distinctly.

...and it wasn't just *his* tongue that was loosed. The tongue of the *people* was loosed, too. "They were astonished beyond measure, saying, he has done all things well!" Their tongues did not boast in man, but in God. They did not brag about self, but about Jesus. It was not a song about man's ability to fix, but of God's ability. It was a song about what *Jesus* did.

That's what this week's Vacation Bible School learned about. It learned that the church's liturgy sings *back to God* what he has done *for us*. In fact, the song of the liturgy is not man-made; it is God-made. That is, the liturgy is made up of

songs lifted right out of scripture and put to liturgical music. We sing these scriptures week after week. We burn them into our memory.

Think about, for example, the scripture burned into our memory during the communion liturgy; the service we sing the majority of Sundays. Just like the angels sang of Jesus coming that first Christmas, so we sing of his coming in the preaching of the gospel - "Glory be to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will to men.^{vi}" Just like the festive Palm Sunday crowd sang of Jesus coming to Jerusalem, so we sing of Jesus coming to us in the sacrament - "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.^{vii}" Just like John the Baptist showed the people Jesus so we sing his words as they show forth Jesus' body and blood in bread and wine to us - "Behold! the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.^{viii}"

Someone might call *that* a broken record, since we do it over and over. We need to be innovative; to create something new each week; to grab attention. Therein lies the problem. Innovation opens up the way for man to boast and brag. Creating something new each week does not aid memory.

It reminds me of a story told of a Prisoner of War; a POW. As a POW he had no freedom; no chaplain; no Bible. He was held prisoner behind bamboo bars. Even so, the liturgy was burned into his memory. It was, because he had heard it Sunday after Sunday growing up. So, behind bamboo bars he was able to lead fellow POWS in the church's liturgy. In the most adverse of conditions, the church's liturgy carried the POWS through that time. It did because God came to them in it. Behind bamboo bars heaven came to earth.

It is the same thing God does for you in the liturgy. He comes to your broken world. He comes to dry your tears, to bind your broken hearts, to recreate you, to give you hope for the new heaven and new earth. Week after week the liturgy burns that into your hearts. You have it wherever you are – behind bamboo bars, in times of trouble, on the sickbed, etc.

So, if someone wants to call the church's liturgy a broken record, so be it. The truth is that *man's* song is the *real* broken record. Unlike man's broken record that sings man's failed song, the church's liturgy sings God's sure song; his work for us in Christ Jesus. It is the "new" song; the new song that restores paradise; that fixes the broken world. It looses our tongues to sing, "He has done all things well!" Amen!

ⁱ Citations to the text (NKJV) are not cited in the sermon

ⁱⁱ Genesis 1.31

ⁱⁱⁱ *A New Song*, Pax Domine, Vacation Bible School, Lesson 1 Students Booklet

^{iv} Isaiah 53.4

^v Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary, #72.3

^{vi} ELH, p.64, Luke 2.14

^{vii} ELH, p. 76, Matthew 21.9

