

The other day I was parked at the lights alongside a car that was visibly shaking, not because of the engine but because of the sound system in the boot. You could see the boot lid and side panels warping with the beat coming from inside! I thought the young man inside must either be deaf, or else he soon will be! There must have been a time in my life when I liked things louder, but these days I prefer the sound of silence! “Mid-life” must be the time between wanting the sound up to a deafening level and having to have the sound up to that level because you are going deaf!

On the road one day Jesus met a man who only knew silence. He was deaf and he couldn't speak properly, the two often go together. You can't even hear your own voice. Imagine what that would be like. Not to be able to hear anything. Sometimes in our homes on a bad day we might think that would be sheer bliss! But imagine never hearing the sound of your children and grand-children, rain on the roof, not being able to listen to your favourite music or the radio and imagine never hearing the words “I love you”. Imagine what it would be like not to hear conversations or be able to use a telephone, to live in a silent world, an isolating world. Even people who are mildly deaf tell me that it can be very embarrassing because people look at you as if you are stupid when you don't respond to what they are saying. The son of an elderly member came out of church one day and said: “I'm so glad dad is getting a new hearing aid, at last he will be able to hear the sermon.” I had no idea this man had been sitting in the pew for months not hearing a word! And he used to thank me for the sermon!

The deaf and dumb man had some friends, some people who were at least understanding of him and sympathetic towards him and so they bring him to Jesus and begged him to place his hands on him.

Now Jesus didn't suggest he come to the next healing rally at the local church. He does not suggest the man to go and find a surgeon who could insert cochlear implants, Jesus took him off alone, away from the crowd. He simply stuck his fingers in the man's ears, spat, and touched the man's tongue. Now if your doctor did that you would probably think about suing him for malpractice! But Jesus was communicating to the man in a way he could understand, by touching the places that needed healing, and spit was regarded as having healing properties in those days, containing the power of the person. (today we would be worried about swine flu or hepatitis!) Jesus was using the language the man could understand and an approach that was commonly accepted in healing for the sake of the man. But then he does something unique. He looked up to heaven as if to tell the man this is where help and healing comes from, and then he said “Ephphatha” which means “**open up**”. At once the man was able to hear, his speech impediment was removed and he began to talk without any trouble. It was indeed a miracle.

Puzzling then that Jesus ordered them not to talk about this to anyone. The man could hear and talk properly for the first time and he is told to shut up about this. But the more Jesus ordered them not to, the more they spoke. And all who heard were completely amazed. “**How well he does everything!**” they exclaimed, “**he even causes the deaf to hear and the dumb to speak**”.

How well he does everything. Those words remind us of the words of God as he stood back and looked at his finished creation in Genesis 1 and said “**and behold it is very good!**”. Jesus has the touch of God, because he is God. God come to restore his world that has been broken by sin. A world where ears and eyes and lives and relationships are not what they were intended to be from the beginning. And in Jesus Christ God comes into his world on foot, with human hands reaching out to touch us and make us whole. When Jesus stuck his fingers in the man's ears they were God's fingers, when he put spit on the man's tongue it

was God's spit. When he says "**open up**" it was with the authority of God himself opening the man's ears and releasing the man's tongue.

What Jesus did fulfilled the promise of the Old Testament prophet Isaiah that the Messiah would enable the blind to see and the deaf to hear and the lame to leap and dance.

But this was only the beginning of what the Christ would do. That's why Jesus told them to be quiet. There was more to come. He was more than an ear, nose and throat specialist! He came to die in blood, sweat and tears on the cross for our forgiveness and to rise to life and touch the whole world with eternal life. That is the message we proclaim to anyone who has ears to hear. Not only about a Jesus who still today can heal ears and eyes and prolong life for a few more years here and now, whether through doctors or in without them, but we proclaim the Jesus who can save you for all eternity through that sign, that action of grace on the cross, that word which forgives your sins and assures your place in heaven. That is truly the greatest miracle to take place in our lives.

And it has. When we were baptised our spiritual deafness was turned into an openness to God, the openness of faith that hears and welcomes God's word. And in baptism our tongues were loosened to speak his word, to sing of it in worship and to share it with others. Very early in the church's history at a baptism the pastor would touch the right and left ears and then the lips of the person baptised and say "*the Lord made the deaf hear and the dumb speak. Therefore in his name I say: be opened, so that you may hear and speak the word of God*". Over time even baptized children of God can become spiritually hard of hearing, and even hardened to God's voice and word, and we need to pray God will open our ears through his Spirit once again.

Maybe you have been wondering what today's Gospel about a deaf man has to do with Father's Day. Well there are a lot of deaf and dumb fathers out there - sometimes I am one of them - deaf to my children, deaf to my wife and deaf to God's voice too. Fathers who are not listening and not speaking properly or at all to their own families let alone to God. Men who have never heard their own fathers say "he does everything well" or said it to their own children and who have not heard that God the Father loves them either. Children who have longed to hear that their earthly and heavenly Father thinks they are worth anything and loves them and is pleased with them.

The deaf man's friends brought him to Jesus and begged him to touch him.

In our prayer time today we bring to Jesus all those men who are deaf to their families, and to God himself, and children who no longer listen to or speak well to and of their fathers. Our special task as a church is to make sure people hear that life giving and life saving word of God, the word of Jesus that forgives and opens up new life and the possibility of new and restored relationships. "**Be opened**" we pray today, may we and every man woman and child be opened to God and his word and open to each other as fathers and children.

Jesus told the crowds to keep quiet about the miracle but they blabbed about it all over the place. Yet when Jesus tells us to go and tell his good news to the whole world we sometimes act as if we didn't hear him and we keep silent! We need to pray that God would make us open not only to hearing but to speaking about our his love for all his children.

Jesus made a deaf man hear and able to talk.

May he speak those words "**Open up!**" to our ears and tongues today, so that his word may reach someone and open up a whole new world and life for them too.