

“Ephphatha – Be Opened!”

Mark 7:24-37

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From the Pulpit

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Let us pray: O Ever-present and Ever-near God, we acknowledge Your active and felt presence among us at this time. Open our hearts and minds that we would receive Your Word for us this day. And O dear God, may the words that I have to offer here, this morning, please You and honor You and glorify Your holy name.

In Jesus’ name, we pray, Amen.

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Ephphatha, Ephphatha! (pronounced, “EF – fa – tha”)

In our Gospel reading from Mark this morning, Jesus places his fingers into the ears of a deaf man and looked up to heaven and sighed and said, “Ephphatha,” and *immediately*, the man’s hearing was restored!

Ephphatha.

Ephphatha is an *especially* challenging word – both to pronounce *and* to spell, *and* it is a word that appears in the Bible only once – right here, here, in Mark’s Gospel which, as you may recall, is the earliest account of the Gospel news.

Ephphatha is the Greek form of the Aramaic word that Jesus used in this miracle story in which he healed a man who had been deaf and mute.

And so, ephphatha literally means, “Be opened!”

And, in *this* story, then, it was the man’s ears that had been opened again.

Ephphatha!

Now, as you may have noticed, our Gospel reading from Mark for today actually includes TWO healing stories:

- this story of the man who had been deaf;
- as well as the familiar story of the Syrophenician woman who had approached Jesus on behalf of her daughter who was suffering.

And so, this **woman**, who was also considered a **foreigner**, was desperate, and she begged Jesus to cast the demon out of her daughter.

And while we, as followers of Jesus today, want to believe that Jesus, *of course*, would have healed this distraught woman's daughter ... he doesn't ... at least not right away!

Rather, Jesus said:

Let the children be fed first for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs!

Wait. What?! Did Jesus really say that?! Did he just disrespect and dismiss and refer to this *desperate* mother as a dog?!

Well ... yes ... it certainly appears that way ... according to what is written.

This story reminds us that Jesus was as fully human as he was divine.

Now, let's back up a bit in this narrative to the beginning of this story in Mark 7 where we are told that *Jesus set out and went away to the region of Tyre where he entered a house and did not want anyone to know where he was.*

And so, it seems as though we are catching a glimpse of Jesus' *fully human side* in this moment when he comes across as impatient and dismissive ... and even cranky!

And, at the same time, we can only imagine how desperately Jesus was wanting to be left alone.

He was probably exhausted from all of the preaching and teaching and healing and responding to the overwhelming needs of the crowds – as well as all the walking and hiking and sleeping outdoors.

And, no doubt, Jesus was still grieving and bereft by the recent and tragic and gruesome death of his beloved cousin and friend and faithful follower, John the Baptist.

And nevertheless, this foreigner, this outsider, this *Syrophoenician woman* tracked down and **found** Jesus ... and she **persisted!**

She did not take no for an answer, and she stood up and she spoke up, and she begged Jesus for what she needed which took A LOT of courage on her part – given that Jesus, as a man had a **lot more** power than she did as a woman in that society at that time.

And so, how did Jesus **then** respond to her plea?

Well, Jesus acknowledged her and listened to her and heard her deepest need and understood what this desperate and devoted mother was pleading for – and so, in response, Jesus healed her daughter!

In my recent reflections on this familiar story, I have come to understand that this highly charged moment with the Syrophoenician woman was, if you will, an EPHPHATHA moment for Jesus.

As this strong and persistent and resilient woman advocated for what she needed – *Jesus was opened* and was, **then**, able to hear and understand and appreciate and recognize her deepest need.

And, in response, he healed her daughter.

Ephphatha.

Ephphatha.

Be opened.

Our Gospel reading for today teaches us that God comes to us in different ways and often unexpected ways and inspires us to **be opened!**

Where – and how – in *your* personal life – **or** in our life together – are **we** being called to open ourselves up:

to **new ways** of seeing;

or **new ways** of being;

or **new ways** of living in community together as followers of Jesus Christ?

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As all of you know by now, our first-ever First Church Engagement Fair will take place in Parish Hall after worship this morning. And it will be an opportunity for you to discover the numerous ways to become involved and share your time and talents and gifts to volunteer and:

serve on a commission or committee;

or work on a project;

or teach our children and youth;

or get involved in our music ministry;

or host a gathering;

or serve a hot meal to those who are hungry;

or work in the gardens on our property;

or volunteer in the church office;

or maybe even start a new ministry!

This list of possibilities goes on and on and on!

Our Engagement Fair today is *truly* an opportunity for you – and for all of us – to “be opened!”

As all of you know by now, here, at First Church, we are also experiencing **an opening** of another kind as we prepare for Rev. Tim’s retirement next month.

Later in October, we will celebrate Rev. Tim’s nearly 25 years of spirited and impactful ministry within our congregation and throughout the wider community.

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And so, these days and weeks ahead leading up to Rev. Tim’s last Sunday as our Senior Pastor (on October 20) are a deeply meaningful and profound time in the life of our congregation ...

because it is a time for all of us to be **opened** and to share our thoughts and feelings *with* Tim and with one another as we navigate these significant times of change and transition and loss – together.

No matter how difficult and painful it may be to say “good-bye” or “see you later,” **that** is the work that all of us **must** do. It is the work that we are **called to do** through our covenant with Rev. Tim – and with one another – and with the wider church.

It is, indeed, a time to be opened – together!

Ephphatha! Ephphatha! Be opened!

Thanks be to God, amen!

