

Sermon #1,158: St. Mark 7:31-37 (*Historic Gospel*)

8-23-15 (Trinity 12), Bethany-Princeton MN

Hymns: "Holy Spirit, Hear Us"; 72:5; 456; 439; communion 315, 318, 442

## GOD HAS SYMPATHY FOR YOU, REVEALED IN JESUS' WORKS

**The Sermon Text, St. Mark 7:31-37 (v. 33-34).** And He took him aside from the multitude, and put His fingers in his ears, and He spat and touched his tongue. Then, looking up to heaven, He sighed, and said to him, "Ephphatha," that is, "Be opened." Lord, this is Your Word and these are Your words. Sanctify us by the truth. Your Word is truth. Lord Jesus, sometimes we wonder if anyone understands. We live in a cold, cruel world. It is so hard to find true sympathy and compassion. But You bring God's sympathy to us in Your own body, for You were touched with the feeling of our infirmities. You do not stay distant from us but come to heal us in the means of grace. Help us, Lord, that we define ourselves not by what this cold world says, but by what Your sympathy says about our worth and value. Amen!

Dear fellow redeemed in Christ: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

**"Jesus sighed."** When I get to heaven, I am going to look up St. Mark and thank him for including this. This detail shows Jesus' emotion. Mark is the one out of the four gospels that does this the most.

It is important to see Jesus having human emotions and feelings, because this is one of the reasons we can believe that He not only is true God but also became a true man. His human nature is real. He had real human emotions. This is shown in the gospels, like here.

But it's also important because this emotional response reveals that God has sympathy for you. It's revealed in Jesus' works, most often in His miracles. Why in His miracles? Because in every case, Jesus' miracles were performed for needy, suffering people. People in need of sympathy. People who often didn't receive sympathy from other people.

Isn't that strange? Sympathy is really the one thing you would think we could expect from one another. Examining the word more closely, *pathos* is suffering, and the *sym-* prefix means "together." So

*sympathy* is “suffering together with.” Besides needing relief from the suffering, what you are looking for is someone to suffer with you. Not to have the pain that you have, but to walk with you, to be an understanding companion. “Misery loves company,” not to wish misery on them but just to have company. In all God’s creation, there is one species uniquely qualified to do this for a person: other people. For everybody suffers. From youngest to oldest there is nobody here who has it all, nobody who hasn’t cried, hasn’t suffered disappointment, hasn’t been in need.

The human heart by nature doesn’t look to God for sympathy. It assumes that God is above this. That these emotions are beneath Him. That He expects you to buck up, dig deep, and handle it. That He is up where everything is serene and perfect, you are down here in the dirt.

So this is one of the surprises in the gospels. Jesus reveals to us that God is not like that. God sent Jesus to reveal that He isn’t like that. In Hebrews it says ***“we do have a High Priest ... Jesus the Son of God ... who can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities” (4:14, 15).***

The gospel that really shows this well is Mark’s. It was written initially for a Roman audience, which valued strength – so what a surprise to see that Jesus’ moments of power, His miracles, are combined with His demonstrations of great gentleness, His sympathy.

But also Mark’s gospel, according to the apostle John and other witnesses of the early church, represents Peter’s remembrances, in the individual details. What we know of Peter is that his emotions were always all out there. Then consider Mark himself. What we know of him in the book of Acts is that he had deserted Paul and Barnabas on their first mission journey, most likely out of fear when they were in distress. Mark would have experience with a bruised, tender conscience. So it seems natural that a gospel built on Peter’s remembrances, written by an overly sensitive man full of fears and insecurities would take special notice of Jesus’ emotions. Mark does two things in this regard, and they are both present in this miracle involving the deaf-and-mute man.

First, Mark shows Jesus' emotional response. In this case it is that Jesus "**sighed.**" Maybe we think that isn't that significant. But it is! A sigh is always filled with emotion of some kind. Sometimes our sighs are filled with frustration, or impatience, or sadness. With us there is usually sin involved. But not with Jesus.

He sees this man who is such a picture of misery. People would approach him and try to talk to him. Soon they'd frown, give up, and go away. When he would try to say something to them, it went the same. They would try to figure out what he was saying, for a bit. Then they would frown, give up, and go away. He had such a lonely life! He was doomed to being in a world all by himself. Everywhere he went he was all alone. This man pictures what the devil would like for everybody. Being unable to hear the Gospel, unable to hear anything good, any word of love, hearing nothing but the accusing voice in your guilty conscience. Being unable to cry out for help, unable to be heard and understood by others, unable to pray out loud, unable to sing or speak God's praises.

Jesus sighs, or groans, as His response to this. He has anguish over the devil's work. He has longing for the good of each soul. His groan utters what the man – and what everyone by nature – cannot express. The man could see Jesus groaning. His sigh says something to us too. It says that God is not removed. God is involved. He has sympathy for whatever misery, affliction, disappointment, or sadness you have.

The second thing Mark does in the realm of emotions is to show Jesus touching people. In his gospel he shows Jesus touching a person no less than 10 times, the most in any gospel. Each time this is in a miracle, just like here when He touches the man in his ears and on his tongue. You might be tempted to think: Well, He just did that to heal him. Especially in this case where the man could not hear, Jesus' actions were like a sermon without words. The man could see and feel that Jesus was healing his hearing and his speaking. But it most definitely is not just what Jesus had to do to heal him. As we know, Jesus didn't have to touch in order to heal, He could even be miles away and heal.

In touching the man (in the ears and on the tongue), Jesus was giving him a message. He is there for Him, with Him, physically. God is in the flesh, in Jesus Christ. He connects himself to the man's damaged flesh, even in the inner parts of his ear and mouth. He is not concerned about germs or ear wax. Touching him in this way, and healing him in the same moment, Jesus is revealing not only that God has sympathy for him, but that He is actually with the man, connecting to him physically and not only spiritually or emotionally.

This is saying something to you. God has sympathy for you. You need that message, living in a world that does not offer you sympathy. Often people will turn away from you just when you need them. You will lose people you need, through death or because they move or have to be gone for this or that reason. Hardly anyone can really say they understand what you are going through. People don't have time for you. Who takes the time to listen? Who will be there to go with you all the way through whatever it is you are suffering? Friends are fleeting. When things get hard many of them drift away or are suddenly unavailable.

Except for the Lord, the Triune God who reveals what He is like in the Son of God, Jesus Christ. In His works, in miracles like these, He reveals what He is like. He has sympathy for you. He sighs and groans over your every misery. He was so bold as to touch sinners, revealing that He in whose body dwells all the fullness of God joins your flesh with His.

What He shows in part in miracles like this is seen in full later in the Gospels, where Jesus has His body nailed to the cross, and in His resurrection has His disciples put their hands into His wounds. His death was for you! His resurrection was for you! His crucified and risen body is connected to yours! Everything that belongs to His real human body – including His real human emotions – is connected to you, in your body and your emotions. He took your pain and suffering, even the emotional suffering and anguish, into His own body. His death and resurrection sanctifies and purifies everything you experience emotionally.

The way this works out, the way this miracle is actually done for you, is that He comes to you. He is present with you and for you. Not just spiritually, but He is bodily present. This is most clear in the Lord's Supper – where His body is joined with yours – but it's also true in Baptism and in the preaching of the Word. He is present in both natures, in His true humanity as well as His divinity. He joins His body to you. He is close to you, not far off. The emotional part is not beneath Him.

We, the Church, are the friends who bring you to Him. Your pastor simply brings you to Christ and He takes you aside and does this miracle. Then He gives you back to us, as someone who hears and believes the Gospel, and is able to speak accordingly. This means that you define yourself not by what the world says to you and of you, but only by what Christ says of you and to you.

He always has time for you. He will see you all the way. He will not leave your side. He understands, because He came down from heaven and took your humanity as His own. He indeed was touched with the feeling of your infirmities. He has sympathy for you, and this powerfully says you have infinite worth and value. Amen!