

**THE FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY**

Text: St. Luke 5:1-11

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE ✠ SON, AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

In Psalm 51 King David prays, *“O LORD, open Thou my lips, And my mouth shall show forth Thy praise.”* Indeed, it is for this very purpose that God opens the mouths of His children, that they may show forth in praise of God, for he who confesses with his mouth the LORD JESUS CHRIST, and believes in his heart that God has raised Him from the dead, will be saved. This is God’s promise, and it is God’s will for all men. *“For ‘whoever calls on the Name of the LORD shall be saved.’”*

But this is not the confession of the world around us and because of the corruption that freely reigns within our own sinful flesh, it is not truly our confession either. Just like the Hebrews of old, it is as though we sit in a pot of boiling water like the proverbial frog that could not feel the heat until it was too late to escape death. Thus, while our culture slowly changes around us we do not feel the debilitating effects of its immorality on our own lives, our own faith and beliefs, or our own confession. Not wanting to create waves and draw too much attention to ourselves, we go along to get along, and in so doing, we are separated further and further from our God and from what the Church once believed, taught, and confessed about Him.

What do I mean? A poll conducted more than two decades ago by the Barna Research Group (a pan-Christian consulting firm) across Lutheran synods, including our own beloved Missouri Synod, recorded the following:

- Only 34% of those Lutherans polled believed that the Bible is inerrant in all it teaches.
- Only 79% believed that Satan exists.
- 73% of Lutherans believed that one can work one’s way into heaven.
- Only 33% believed that JESUS is without sin.
- Only 72% believed in God as we confess Him in the three Ecumenical Creeds—The Apostles’, Nicene, and Athanasian Creeds.
- And sadly, only 55% of those Lutherans polled felt that their faith was important to them at all.

Remember, this poll was conducted more than 20 years ago. Ten years later, only 24% of those who called themselves Christian believed that Satan exists. Only 28% believed we are saved by grace through faith alone. Only 32% believed Jesus is without sin. 68% of those questioned rejected the doctrine of the inerrancy of Holy Scripture.

Fast forward another 10 years and the term “*post-truth*” is now used by so-called social scientists to describe our current culture in the United States; a term which implies that reality is relative and even scientific and historical facts are open to interpretation.

Frighteningly, it appears such interpretation has crept into our churches, seriously eroding the credibility of Christianity and undermining the Christian faith. Barna continues with sobering data that shows the areas in which Christianity’s influence is waning. Only “about one-third of Americans (36%) strongly believe churches “*have their best interest at heart,*” and one in four (25%) does not put stock in pastors’ insights on the issues of the day.

“Meanwhile, truth is increasingly regarded as something *felt*, or relative (44%), rather than something *known*, or absolute (35%)—a shift reflected in other new religion surveys... For example, many Americans (56%), and especially Millennials (64%), do not feel that any one religious text has a monopoly on truth, but that they are all different expressions of the same spiritual message. As a result, some spiritually inclined Americans seek faith outside of the local church context, as is the case with ‘*the spiritual but not religious*’ or those who [claim to] ‘*love Jesus but not the Church....*’

“As of early 2020, just one in four Americans (25%) qualified as a practicing Christian. *In essence, the share of practicing Christians has nearly dropped in half since 2000.*” Believe me when I say that the conditions within our culture and faith since then have not improved, but are growing worse by the day. Slowly but surely we have come to the point that even the majority of Lutherans do not believe in the Bible.

So it is that the largest Lutheran body in the land, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, now regularly ordains practicing homosexuals and transsexuals in addition to women, and they can pay for abortions for their female pastors and teachers as well. As if that is not bad enough, even now, our own beloved synod, the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, has begun to look the other way while congregations appoint women as deacons and pastoral assistants who perform (though “*act out*” might be a better choice of words) Word and Sacrament ministry. We have placed women in positions within our congregations where they hold authority over men, something clearly prohibited by Scripture.

But hey, what does it matter? After all, the Bible is full of errors, right? It may *contain* the Word of God, but anyone with just one ounce of common sense should know that it cannot possibly *be* the inspired, infallible Word of God in all its parts, right? How could anyone actually believe that the Bible was written by anyone but imperfect and corrupt men with their own selfish, sinful agendas? Surely you do not believe it was written by God? Saint Paul and the other apostles were nothing more than misogynistic homophobes, and besides, today we are so much more civilized and sophisticated than were people who lived in those days. We are far more wise, are we not! We have a better idea than God, right? Just trust in your feelings! Or as young people say today, “*Feel your vibes!*” But, my dear friends, do you not also hear Satan whispering in your ear, “*Has God indeed said...?*”

Still, for one to believe such things begs a question does it not? When one discounts any part of Holy Scripture, what does one do with what is left? If you do not believe that God's Word is inerrant in all its parts, what part *do* you believe? What part *can* you believe? If one deconstructs the Word of God, God's Word of reconciliation and peace, where is one to find peace? To whom shall we go? Is it not God who, alone, has the Words of eternal life?

Thus, the tendency of sinful man is to make for himself a god in his own image—a god who can be manipulated by man and made to be anything, made to say anything, overlook anything and everything, even the most heinous of sins. No longer do we pray *“Thy will be done...”* but rather *“my will be done.”* Instead of the God of the Holy Bible, we fabricate a JESUS who is much more amenable to our sinful will and desires, a JESUS, who simply winks at sin, pats us on the head, and sends us on our merry, sinful way.

So it is, that God, through His HOLY SPIRIT, and by the hand of Saint Mark, has seen fit to give us this account of JESUS' healing of the deaf-mute. In our Gospel text, a man is brought, presumably by friends, to JESUS for healing. Being a deaf-mute, he is imprisoned in a suffocating, otherworldly silence. He cannot speak intelligible words and he cannot even hear the sounds he does make. He was isolated from man and God and was probably treated much as we treat life in the womb today—as something less than human.

Tragically, because he could not hear, it would have been impossible for him to know or understand the works and love of God. He could not even pray to or worship God. He had never heard about JESUS and there is no way he could have ever come to JESUS on his own. Holy Scripture tells us *“we walk by faith, not by sight,”* and *“faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.”* Without the gift of hearing, this man could not know his LORD because he could not hear His Word and believe it.

How much like this man's physical condition is our spiritual condition. This text reflects the natural spiritual condition of all humanity. As this man stood mute and unhearing before his Creator, we too, stand before God with stopped-up ears and sin-tied tongues, for when left on our own there is nothing within us that desires to hear the Word of God or confess His CHRIST, and often, if we hear His Word at all, we prefer to ignore the teacher and hear the voice of God through the filters of our own selfish, sinful desires, and self-devised wisdom.

Thus, Saint Paul writes, *“The natural man does not receive the things of the SPIRIT of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.”* We are born spiritually deaf and dumb. In fact, by nature, we are worse off than simply being deaf-mutes, because by nature we are dead in our sins and the dead cannot speak and the dead cannot hear.

Even though we know what we have just heard to be true, we cannot allow it to drive us to despair. There is hope for all of us who are hard of hearing and slow of speech. For just as JESUS entered into the life of the deaf-mute in our Gospel text, so too, does He enter into the life of all Christians that they may hear the Word of God and believe it—and still, not simply believe it, but believe and confess it.

Yes, baptized and redeemed Christians are confessing Christians who can say to Satan, *“Your raging, your threats, your hate, and your accusations mean nothing. I am Baptized into CHRIST! I am a child of God; a sinner, yes, but a forgiven sinner! I am redeemed by the precious Blood of Him who died on the Cross to save me, paying a price I could not pay, who was raised again on the third day leaving sin and eternal death in the tomb, who ascended into heaven and has promised that He will one day return for me, calling me out from the dust of my grave and taking me to live with Him eternally in heaven. Yes, I am Baptized into CHRIST and...*

*“Now that to the font I’ve traveled,  
All your might has come unraveled,  
And against your tyranny,  
God, my LORD unites with me!”* (LSB, 594)

JESUS came to the suffering at the Sea of Galilee. Today, He still comes to all who are weary and heavy laden, to all who suffer the pains of sin and attacks of the devil. Here, in this holy house, JESUS sticks His fingers into the ears of His people. In our text, the finger of JESUS signifies the HOLY SPIRIT. Jesus puts His fingers into your ears and touches His finger to your tongue that you can hear His Word, and in believing it, open your mouth and confess Him as your LORD, and *“if you confess with your mouth the LORD JESUS and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.”*

But how is this done? It is done through hearing the preached Word and receiving the Holy Sacraments. Through these miraculous gifts from the bounty of God’s grace, JESUS puts His fingers into your ears and places Himself upon your tongue. He fills you with His HOLY SPIRIT through Holy Baptism that with Him you can raise your eyes to heaven from whence comes your help.

The Words of our LORD shatter the chains that bind you. He says to you, *“Ephphatha,”* that is, *“Be opened.”* By water and the SPIRIT, you are set free from the powers of sin, death, and the devil. At the font, on the day of your Baptism, you were liberated by the LORD JESUS from the control of Satan and the tyranny of sin, death, and the grave. JESUS has taken you aside, separating you from the multitude of sinners as *“a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.”* Now, His SPIRIT intercedes for you before our FATHER in heaven *“with groanings which cannot be uttered.”*

Our LORD groans because He takes into Himself all the things which cause us to groan—pain, loneliness, sickness, sorrow, death—whatever Satan uses in an attempt to bind and imprison us. JESUS takes from Himself and pours into us, His precious Blood. He places His Flesh upon our tongues, strengthening us *“against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness,”* who would enslave us.

JESUS has overcome Satan and taken away his power. The strong man is overcome by the Stronger God-Man, JESUS CHRIST. He came to make all things whole. He came to destroy death with His death, to recreate creation, and restore it to the image of His FATHER. In His death and resurrection, JESUS has brought the imaginings of Satan to nothing and released our tongues to speak plainly and joyfully about our God's immeasurable goodness. Now we can go forth and with the multitudes proclaim salvation in JESUS to all who have ears to hear. *“JESUS has done all things well. He makes both the deaf to hear and the mute to speak.”*

Know now, that already, this very morning, JESUS has put His fingers into your ears so that you can hear, and in hearing, *“you may believe that JESUS is the CHRIST, the SON of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.”*

So come! JESUS, Himself, is now inviting you to receive His salvation. He is inviting you to open *your* mouth so that He can touch your tongue and there place His very own Body and Blood upon it. To you, He says, *“Ephphatha!”* Be completely opened! For JESUS has something wonderful He desperately wants you to hear. He wants you to hear the words, *“I forgive you all your sins.”*

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE ✠ SON, AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

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