



Good morning and welcome.

We've had another great week of weather; only hope it continues into next week as Evelyn and I are heading down to Galloway for a week's retreat in the yurt. I have chosen a few verses from Isaiah 35 to start with this morning, to fit in with our Reading.

Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who have an anxious heart, "Be strong; fear not! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God. He will come and save you."

Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy. For waters break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert; And a highway shall be there, and it shall be called the Way of Holiness.

And the ransomed of the LORD shall return and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

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I heard the voice of Jesus say,
"Come unto Me and rest;
lay down, thou weary one, lay down
thy head upon My breast."
I came to Jesus as I was,
weary, and worn, and sad;
I found in Him a resting place,
and He has made me glad.

I heard the voice of Jesus say,
"Behold, I freely give
the living water; thirsty one,
stoop down and drink, and live."
I came to Jesus, and I drank
of that life-giving stream;
my thirst was quenched, my soul revived,
and now I live in Him.

I heard the voice of Jesus say,
"I am this dark world's light;
look unto Me, thy morn shall rise,
and all thy day be bright."
I looked to Jesus, and I found
in Him my star, my sun;
and in that light of life I'll walk
till travelling days are done.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=74kyfROS4q8>

Let's pray

Father, help us to be still, to be silent for a while as we seek the Lord while he may be found and call upon his name while he is near... We confess we are restless by nature; we busy ourselves with many things when only one thing is needful; we clutter our lives with so much noise at times, the television, radio, mobile phone; when we need to make time to listen for your still small voice of calm. We thank you for the example of Jesus, who made time to be with you in desert places, away from the madding crowds. Forgive us Father, if at some time in the past we stopped listening, stopped hearing, stopped responding to your word. Open our ears now to hear your word and open our lips to proclaim your praise. We ask this in Jesus' name who taught us to pray:

Our Father...



In my time working in agricultural workshops, the contents of sandwiches was usually a topic of conversation in the 'brew room'. Some people stuck to the same filling everyday, which was very often cheese, or cheese and ham with some pickle maybe (tomatoes made the bread soggy and were not popular). Other people preferred variety, fish paste, chicken and, for the more cultured even coronation chicken!

Our Reading today is part of a sandwich filling between two pieces about bread, these are the feeding of the five thousand and the feeding of the four thousand. This sandwich has three fillings (plus a side of chips which we won't have time for I'm afraid!). The first is an argument about hand washing between Jesus and the Jews: working on agricultural machinery necessitated the washing of hands before eating, but Jesus insists it shouldn't be viewed as a religious obligation. It's relevance is better understood when we consider that the feeding of the five thousand was amongst Jews (the ritually clean), whereas the feeding of the four thousand is outside of Judea amongst gentiles, the great unwashed. So the story prepares us for the revelation that kingdom of heaven is open to all, clean and unclean, because it's the word of Jesus alone that can make us clean.

The other two components of this sandwich filling make up our Reading this morning. They are two separate episodes, both of which record an encounter between Jesus and gentiles, otherwise they don't have much in common; a bit like ham and cheese!

Reading: Mark 7: 24-37

Then Jesus left and went away to the territory near the city of Tyre. He went into a house and did not want anyone to know he was there, but he could not stay hidden. A woman, whose daughter had an evil spirit in her, heard about Jesus and came to him at once and fell at his feet. The woman was a Gentile, born in the region of Phoenicia in Syria. She begged Jesus to drive the demon out of her daughter. But Jesus answered, "Let us first feed the children. It isn't right to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs."

"Sir," she answered, "even the dogs under the table eat the children's leftovers!"

So Jesus said to her, "Because of that answer, go back home, where you will find that the demon has gone out of your daughter!"

She went home and found her child lying on the bed; the demon had indeed gone out of her.

Jesus then left the neighborhood of Tyre and went on through Sidon to Lake Galilee, going by way of the territory of the Ten Towns. Some people brought him a man who was deaf and could hardly speak, and they begged Jesus to place his hands on him. So Jesus took him off alone, away from the crowd, put his fingers in the man's ears, spat, and touched the man's tongue. Then Jesus looked up to heaven, gave a deep groan, and said to the man, "*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. Then Jesus ordered the people not to speak of it to anyone; but the more he ordered them not to, the more they told it. 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!”

Amen.



The first episode in our reading is perhaps one of the most remarkable in the New Testament, it certainly bowled Jesus over. Jesus was a well outside Jewish territory, about 40 miles North of Nazareth. He had left Galilee to get away from the crowds to have some quiet time with his disciples; he was not on a mission to the gentiles, in fact quite the opposite; he went to some lengths to avoid any interaction with them, but, as our reading says, 'He could not escape notice.' A local gentile woman hears about him and makes her request. It is clear that Jesus is not predisposed towards granting her wishes (and in Matthews account the disciples tell her to get lost!); Jesus is on retreat and wants to devote this time to his disciples, yet she persists and gets what she came for. Jesus cannot but grant the request of anyone who comes to him with such persistent faith. That is such a huge incentive for us all to keep on praying; ask and you shall receive.

The second episode is really about how we come by such faith: a deaf and dumb man is brought to Jesus; again, he is somewhat reluctant; he doesn't want to attract a crowd; so he takes him out of the way to perform the miracle. The true significance of this healing doesn't become clear until we read what follows, up to and including Peter's declaration in Mark 8:27-30. The point is this, that no one hears the gospel until they have their ears opened; faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God. Most people have their ears closed to the gospel; they don't want to hear; any preacher will tell you that; and if they do hear and respond it is nothing less than a miracle. And once we have our ears opened to hear, then our tongue is loosed to proclaim God's praise and confess Jesus as Lord, as did Peter in Mark 8:29, "You are the Messiah."

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O for a thousand tongues to sing
my great Redeemer's praise;
the glories of my God and King,
the triumphs of his grace!

Jesus! the name that charms our fears,
that bids our sorrows cease;
'tis music in the sinner's ears,
'tis life and health and peace.

He breaks the power of cancelled sin,
he sets the prisoner free;
his blood can make the foulest clean;
his blood availed for me.

He speaks, and, listening to his voice,
new life the dead receive;
the mournful, broken hearts rejoice,
the humble poor believe.

Hear him, ye deaf; his praise, ye dumb,
your loosened tongues employ;
ye blind, behold your Saviour come;
and leap, ye lame, for joy!

My gracious Master and my God,
assist me to proclaim;
to spread through all the earth abroad,
the honours of your name.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q2kbE1DGeyg>

And now go in peace and in the joy of the Holy Spirit to love and serve the Lord. And the blessing Of God Almighty, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit be with you.

Amen.