

Sermon for September 7th, 2025
TWELFTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

READINGS

Isaiah 29:17-24

17 Is it not yet a very little while
until Lebanon shall be turned into a fruitful field,
and the fruitful field shall be regarded as a forest?

18 In that day the deaf shall hear
the words of a book,
and out of their gloom and darkness
the eyes of the blind shall see.

19 The meek shall obtain fresh joy in the LORD,
and the poor among mankind shall exult in the Holy One of Israel.

20 For the ruthless shall come to nothing
and the scoffer cease,
and all who watch to do evil shall be cut off,

21 who by a word make a man out to be an offender,
and lay a snare for him who reproves in the gate,
and with an empty plea turn aside him who is in the right.

22 Therefore thus says the LORD, who redeemed Abraham, concerning the house of Jacob:

“Jacob shall no more be ashamed,
no more shall his face grow pale.

23 For when he sees his children,
the work of my hands, in his midst,
they will sanctify my name;
they will sanctify the Holy One of Jacob
and will stand in awe of the God of Israel.

24 And those who go astray in spirit will come to understanding,
and those who murmur will accept instruction.”

Psalms 146

1 Praise the LORD!

Praise the LORD, O my soul!

2 I will praise the LORD as long as I live;
I will sing praises to my God while I have my being.

3 Put not your trust in princes,
in a son of man, in whom there is no salvation.

4 When his breath departs, he returns to the earth;
on that very day his plans perish.

5 Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob,
whose hope is in the LORD his God,

6 who made heaven and earth,
the sea, and all that is in them,
who keeps faith forever;

7 who executes justice for the oppressed,
who gives food to the hungry.

The LORD sets the prisoners free;
8 the LORD opens the eyes of the blind.
The LORD lifts up those who are bowed down;
the LORD loves the righteous.
9 The LORD watches over the sojourners;
he upholds the widow and the fatherless,
but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.
10 The LORD will reign forever,
your God, O Zion, to all generations.
Praise the LORD!

Romans 10:9-17

9 because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. **10** For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. **11** For the Scripture says, “Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.” **12** For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. **13** For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”
14 How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? **15** And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!” **16** But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?” **17** So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

Mark 7:31-37

31 Then he returned from the region of Tyre and went through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis. **32** And they brought to him a man who was deaf and had a speech impediment, and they begged him to lay his hand on him. **33** And taking him aside from the crowd privately, he put his fingers into his ears, and after spitting touched his tongue. **34** And looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, “Ephphatha,” that is, “Be opened.” **35** And his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. **36** And Jesus charged them to tell no one. But the more he charged them, the more zealously they proclaimed it. **37** And they were astonished beyond measure, saying, “He has done all things well. He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak.”

Our text for meditation this Twelfth Sunday after Trinity is on our Gospel reading.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Introduction

Just before our reading took place, our Lord was in Tyre to deliver a Syrophoenician woman's daughter from demon possession. Just before He exorcised the demon, He proclaimed that He was sent only to the “lost sheep of the house of Israel.”¹ He also called Gentiles *dogs*, explaining to the woman that it was not right to use His ministry in service of Gentiles. Jesus Christ was born a Jew according to His human nature, and so He reserved His earthly ministry for witnessing to and teaching His kin. This was done to fulfill what the Old Testament prophets had spoken concerning the Messiah; if He did not go first to the Jews, then He would not have been the true Christ.

But is that the whole story, or is there more to it than that? While it is true that He was born a Jew, did Christ *truly* refuse to go to Gentiles? Before we make the mistake of thinking that our Savior is

¹ Matthew 15:24

a Jewish supremacist, our passage shows Him going immediately from Tyre to the Decapolis. The Decapolis, which means “ten cities,” was a group of Gentile-populated towns near Galilee. Famous pagan poets were born in this loose confederation of autonomous Greek towns. Their populations were infamous among the Jews for being part of Alexander the Great's program of *Hellenization*, or trying to make the world adopt Greek culture, Greek customs, the Greek language, and even Greek paganism. Alexander's successors built these ten cities as a monument to the Hellenization project, like a certain “home base” for Gentiles so that Judea would slowly be remade in Alexander's image. This is one of the core reasons our very own New Testament was written in Greek in the first place. Alexander planted the seed of Hellenization some centuries prior, and it was in full bloom by the time our Savior walked in His ministry.

From the very beginning we can tell that Christ is doing something very controversial to the Jews at the time – who *hated* the Decapolis and everything it stood for. He went to a city of Gentiles to heal a Gentile and start teaching. Make no mistake; in our reading, Jesus intentionally goes to the Decapolis with the intent of healing a *Greek* man. Someone might tell you that, since He uses the Aramaic phrase “Ephphatha,” surely he must be speaking to a Jew; after all, that was one of the three languages Jews spoke in that day, and the Greeks in those cities would not understand it. But if that were the case, it would make no sense for Him to perform the healing in secret. If the deaf man was Jewish, He would have stood as a witness to all the Greeks there that He, the Jewish Messiah, was there healing Jews so they should convert in order to receive the same blessing. But Jesus isn't there for that; He has no desire to reverse Hellenization or strip the Gentiles of their Greek identity; He came to heal this man for his own sake. Furthermore, Jesus charges the men who were with their deaf friend to not tell anyone, but they disobey Him and tell everyone in the Decapolis: in the first century, Jews had no dealings with Gentiles so long as they could help it, so they would not have disobeyed Jesus and proclaimed it to the surrounding Greeks!

The Healing of Gentiles

So Jesus heals a Gentile man, right after telling a Gentile woman in Tyre that He was sent only to the Jews. Why would He act this way? Why say one thing and appear to be harsh, but then go around healing people that He *seemed* to reject? Ah, here with our reading we have our answer. First, by healing this deaf man our Lord is showing His disciples that He really does care about us Gentiles. By curing his deafness using an Aramaic term, he keeps anyone from thinking that it was some false god like zeus or apollo behind the miracle. And it is not in any god's name that Christ performs the miracle; being truly Divine, He merely tells the man's ears to open and they are opened. He shows that He is the Lord of all things by opening the ears and mouth.

The deaf man receives this message without needing any extensive catechism or a lesson plan or anything of the sort. He quickly understands that Jesus Christ is the Lord over his well-being, and that no pagan deity can match up. So he and his fellow Gentiles were converted, and they proclaimed His marvelous deed to everyone who could hear. Imagine the refreshing message they spread! This Man, this Jesus of Nazareth, was the only One who actually cared about them; He was *different* then all the hucksters, con artists, black magicians, sorcerers, and pagan priests they were used to seeing. Christ did not ask for money, did not demand his followers become slaves, He did not try to take their women into a harem and He did not instruct him to convert to judaism. He simply came to the man, healed him, and charged him with not saying anything about what happened.

There is a splendid simplicity in their message. The formerly deaf man and his friends go about saying “He has done all things well. He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak.” What does that amount to? To put it simply, people in the Decapolis heard “Look at what this man Jesus did for me! So I believe Him, because He has done wonderful things, and you should too.” I can tell you right now that this was an effective message: immediately after our reading, over four thousand from the Decapolis show up *just to hear Christ speak*, and He feeds them all before going back to His mission to

the Jews.²

Why the Healing?

So why would our Savior do this? Clearly He has a specific mission to the Jews, and He goes about it for the bulk of His ministry before going to the Cross. But He takes this detour into Gentile lands, a journey from Tyre and Sidon all the way to the Decapolis, to show us that He has bigger things in mind than just declaring His Messianic status to His earthly kin. In fact, by taking this time to teach these Gentile multitudes and healing their sick, He was planting the seeds for their entrance into a kingdom that would give them eternal life.

The Greeks planted the seeds of Hellenization by establishing the Decapolis, with the intent of making everyone Greek. Instead of reversing that, or trying to do the opposite and turn a bunch of Greeks into Jews, Jesus Christ was planting the seeds for *Christianization*. He has no problem with them keeping the Greek language, or their culture, and their way of doing business. They can keep their heritage – after all, God gave it to them and they should treasure it and protect it. But because He cares for them, because He wants *all* men of every race to be in His Kingdom, He sets out to bring them to Himself by showing His mercy. This worked too – the Decapolis was entirely Christian within a couple of centuries.

Our reading is a foreshadowing of what He has done for everyone. He cared about the men and women of the Decapolis for their own sake, healing and feeding them without asking for anything in return. With the same motivations, He went to the Cross willingly for all of humanity, paying the price for all of our sins by the shedding of His precious Blood – and rising on the third day so that whoever believes in Him is justified by faith without any payment or works required on their part. The man whom He healed, whose ears had been shut and mouth had been twisted, understood this message loud and clear. He eagerly used those newly opened ears to listen to Christ's teachings and his newly unmuted mouth to proclaim this good news to everyone he could speak to. The question is now, shall we do the same? May we whose ears have always heard listen to our Lord's message, and may our mouths that have never been stopped up be open to proclaim the Gospel – and above all, may our hearts always belong to the Savior who delivered us without any cost to ourselves.

Now the Peace of our Lord, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.