

Twenty-third Sunday Ordinary Time -B -2021
Isaiah 35.4-7///James 2.1-5///Mark 7.31-37

→we don't even know his name....we don't know where he lived or who his family was or what he feared.

--we don't know if he was born into silence or if an illness or injury suddenly shattered his world.

→we don't know if he was patient or bitter, fearful or brave.

→and yet, despite what we don't know about him....we **do know** that his life must have been difficult

→...at a time when the spoken word was the currency of human interaction....his pockets were empty

→...in a culture where illness was seen as a judgment of sin and disability as a verdict of guilt....he stood convicted

→and....in a place where the law and the wisdom of the elders and the *very Word of God* was handed down word by word....from one voice to another....his deafness declared a life of isolation, ignorance and loss

→he could not debate in the marketplace, worship in the temple, study with the scribes, argue with his neighbors, or testify in court

→without words, he was bound and captive in a silent world....denied status, opportunity and hope

PAUSE

→it might be difficult for us to imagine, surrounded as we are...by newspapers and emails, text messages and facebook, twitter and instant messages....to appreciate just how lonely his world must have been

→we can communicate instantly with a friend across the street or a stranger half-way around the world.

→technology allows us speak without opening our mouths...and to receive without hearing a sound

→so it might be tempting, at times, to view the people of this Gospel story as people whose lives have little or no connection to ours...

→after all, two thousand years have passed since Jesus stopped along that dusty road and miraculously opened a man's ears and loosened his tongue.

→and today...we no longer see a speech impediment as a sign of demonic possession or the result of an evil spell...

→we no longer equate deafness with the mark of sin...

→rather than quasi---healers and the laying on of hands...our miracles come from speech therapists and audiologists....antibiotics and cochlear implants.

→however....if we pause for just a moment and reflect about all this....we might discover that we are not so different, after all.

→because....despite all of our technology....there are people today who live in fear and silence...listening for the sound of gunshots to ring out in their neighborhood at any time.

---despite all of our sophistication....there are people today who continue to feed upon prejudice and hate, rejecting anyone who appears to be different...

---despite all of our cleverness...there are still many still drowning in addiction and neglect desperate to fill the emptiness inside...

---despite all of our knowledge and skills....we are still a broken and shattered people, longing to be made whole...

---and despite the passage of two thousand years, if we are honest, we can look deep inside this Gospel story, and find ourselves along the road to Galilee...lonely, wounded, held captive by pain and fear and loss

→by a growing problem of drug abuse, a widening disparity between the rich and poor, and an ever-present and growing lack of respect and graciousness...

PAUSE

→when Jesus reached out to others, his healing power went far beyond the joining of bones or the closing of wounds

→he did more than open ears and loosen tongues

→Jesus knew that despair could be more disfiguring than a scar....and that shame could linger longer than disease....

→he knew that isolation could cut deeper than a wound...and that fear could bind tightly as a shroud.

PAUSE

→Jesus knew that **true healing** always lead to the wholeness of body and soul...to an openness to new life

→and so.....to all of us...hearing or deaf....Jesus says..... “be opened!”

→this command comes to us...as both a blessing and a challenge...

→because it means...being aware of God’s grace and giving thanks for it....

→it means accepting God's love and responding to it

→and this response takes on many forms....because just like the people of the gospel...we too must care for the weakest among us...even when the world claims that they are unworthy.

→....we must testify to God's goodness even when that witness feels uncomfortable

→and...we must embrace our role as stewards of the kingdom even when that task seems larger than we think we can handle

→as followers of Christ...we must choose to live the Gospel message, testifying to it, embracing it and celebrating it as a way of life...even when the world, and the media, and others tell us not to...or discourage us from doing so.

PAUSE

→the silent man along the road to Galilee could not speak the Word of God or even testify in court

→yet after his encounter with Jesus...his gratitude overflowed...and neither he nor his friends would stop testifying...even after Jesus asked them too.

→why should they be silent?

→they had discovered the joy of living and believing in the Lord...the giver of all life...

→to them, and to all of us....hearing or deaf....Jesus once again today invites us to....be opened!