

Be Opened!
by Rev. Sharon Lee MacArthur
For Berkeley Chinese Community Church
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Mark 7:24-37

24 From there he set out and went away to the region of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know he was there. Yet he could not escape notice,²⁵ but a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately heard about him, and she came and bowed down at his feet.²⁶ Now the woman was a Gentile, of Syrophenician origin. She begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter.²⁷ He said to her, 'Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs.'²⁸ But she answered him, 'Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs.'²⁹ Then he said to her, 'For saying that, you may go—the demon has left your daughter.'³⁰ So she went home, found the child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.

31 Then he returned from the region of Tyre, and went by way of Sidon towards the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis.³² They brought to him a deaf man who had an impediment in his speech; and they begged him to lay his hand on him.³³ He took him aside in private, away from the crowd, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spat and touched his tongue.³⁴ Then looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, 'Ephphatha', that is, 'Be opened.'³⁵ And immediately his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly.³⁶ Then Jesus ordered them to tell no one; but the more he ordered them, the more zealously they proclaimed it.³⁷ They were astounded beyond measure, saying, 'He has done everything well; he even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak.'

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The two stories of healing in today's scripture reading give us a definite message – that God's love knows no bounds – it's "no matter who you are or where you are on life's journey" being lived out – demonstrated in a compelling way – Jesus healing first the daughter of a gentile WOMAN! And then a man who was deemed unclean because he had a physical handicap...he stuttered and on top of that he was deaf.



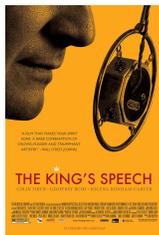
I can't imagine what life must have been for him –

I am reminded of The Kings Speech - a recent movie about

- Queen Elizabeth's father, King George VI



- his stuttering and
- how he worked with his coach to give a most stirring speech heard by the world declaring Great Britain's entering World War II.



Actor Colin Firth painted a vivid portrait of a stutterer - he avoided eye contact with whoever he was talking to, seemed to have irregular breathing patterns, was embarrassed by and ashamed of his stuttering and had low self-esteem. Life was difficult for him – you get the message that life is difficult for stutterers – even for royalty. Imagine how it must have been for someone in ancient Bible times - when any kind of physical handicap relegated you to outskirts of society! and then add a hearing challenge on top of the speech impediment - a very difficult life indeed!

Some people brought to Jesus - **a man just like this**. His life was anything but easy. People – especially those who loved him didn't know WHAT to do with him...



But Jesus knew what to do...he took the man aside from the crowd. Then he poked his finger right in his ear - toward the eardrum of the man. But this poking was only half of it. Jesus took some of his own spit and touched the man's tongue and pulled his finger out of the ear.



Jesus looked up toward heaven as he spoke toward the man: Ephatha! Be Opened!



And the man could suddenly hear - his tongue became free...he could talk as plainly as all of those gawkers who had made a life out of talking about him. Every speech therapist that had worked on the guy since he was little was now speechless.

That whole saliva thing doesn't sound too cool. But it seemed that's exactly what was required. And while we are thinking and saying “yuck!”



don't forget those times when maybe our moms licked her fingers and wiped all that chocolate goo or watermelon drippings from around our mouths when we were babes.

Darlene _____ read to us - Jesus looked up to heaven and sighed - He **mysteriously** looked up into the clouds before turning to the man and saying out loud: Ephatha! Be Opened!

Reminds me of an Anne Lamott story....the writer tells an amusing story of taking her father on errands one day. His brain cancer had progressed to the point where he was reverting to some behaviors of a three-year old. Just before Anne stepped into the local bank one day, she gave Dad a candy bar and strapped him into the passenger seat of her car. There was a huge line at the teller's window where Anne was standing. So, every so often, she would run over to peek out the bank's front window to make sure that Dad was still there ... as if someone was going to kidnap him or something.

She writes: "The last time I looked, he wasn't there. The car was empty. I felt like adrenaline had been injected into my heart. I stared ... out the window and saw this crazy old man pass by the window. His face was smeared with chocolate. He was just walking on by, holding his candy

bar, staring up at the sky as if maybe his next operating instructions were up there."



Jesus mysteriously stared up at the sky while massaging the tongue and the ears of a distressed man. We don't know why he was looking up and surveying the clouds. Maybe it was as if his next operating instructions were up there. Maybe he was looking for power from God, power he did not have apart from God. Maybe God actually spoke to him at that moment and concurred with him that this particular man's bondage - his mental torture - must definitely end. Maybe Jesus was looking for help to shake the crowd he could not shake. Or maybe...just maybe God was reminding Jesus that he should be ready for all those bystanders to get a whole lot more excited about the physical miracle than the spiritual miracle of healing.

Maybe Jesus' role model, coach, guide – Jesus' father was saying, "Get ready for the people to be more focused on the spit and the ear poke thing than by the change that will happen in this man's spirit and attitude."

When you think about it - spiritual miracles delight Jesus much more than physical ones. Physical miracles were relatively easy for Jesus. Or so it seemed. He had an easier time getting a paralyzed man up on his feet and walking, for example, than he did getting the same man to believe his sins were forgiven. Spiritual miracles are the big challenge for Jesus. They're the tough ones.

... which brings me to the question: How is Jesus ever going to get all of us to "open up" our lives a bit more freely? To find better ways to live as if God matters? To release the ligament that's holding back our tongues from speaking more joyously of God and life with God?



EPHATHA! Be Opened!

We can come and worship every single Sunday and behave in all the right ways ... and STILL feel we are not making a difference in the world – but what if we find a way to open ourselves up enough to feel a little of the panic and surprise and power that comes with seeing glimpses of Jesus in our encounters with friends and family – glimpses of a Jesus who uses even spit to heal! Isn't that something to share?

Wouldn't it be great to be set free of all our hang-ups – of living as if our encounters with Jesus and God and the holy spirit are reserved for one hour of church time each week?

Wouldn't it be great if we come alive with our faith and love in a more expressive way - every single day?

Wouldn't it be great if when someone asked you why you believe Jesus & God is really important to you, that we do more than gulp and stutter in confusion?

Don't worry whether or not you have the "right" religious words to speak with others about the difference God makes to you. I don't think religious talk will change the world. AND I don't think we have to master the intricacies of theology to speak lovingly and convincingly of how you experience God, Jesus, the holy spirit.

EPHATHA! Be Opened!

This speech impediment we have on matters of faith is really quite peculiar. Because on most matters in this country, if we're really **for** something, people know.



We post it on facebook or put a bumper sticker on our car. We wave an American flag on the street corner when the kids come home from Iraq. We wear T-Shirts with logos. We tattoo your favorite expression on your bicep.

If we're enthused about the difference that Jesus makes in our life, or how church matters? why wouldn't we find a meaningful way to let people know ... and to share at least a piece of that joy. EPHATHA! Be Opened!



When Martin Luther put together a baptismal liturgy in 1523, the actual rite required the pastor to take some of his own saliva and touch the ears and lips of every child getting baptized. At the same instant, the pastor was to repeat the words of Jesus to the deaf man, that one with the speech impediment. The baptizing pastor was to say: Ephatha - That is, be opened.

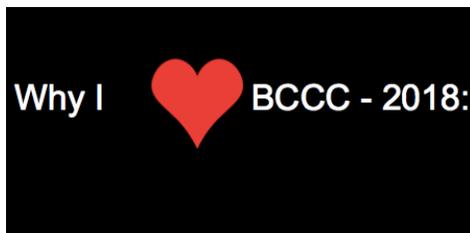
We don't do this anymore and I'm not suggesting that we do that again....

But the idea isn't bad. From the very get-go in life, with a lot of help from parents and pastors and adult mentors, it would be great to find better ways to not be so bound-up with our lives and so tongue-tied with our faith.

Take heart – we're here to help! So here's a baby step –

We're going to practice! We all come to worship on a fairly regular basis. Something keeps us coming back – something says “We love BCCC!” What is it that we love? We've done this exercise in a setting other than worship a while ago...I think it was in a leadership workshop. But we haven't done this – the whole church. So let's do this – “Why I love BCCC - 2018”! In groups of 2 or 3 – share with one another what brings you back again and again. Why do you love BCCC? How do you experience God/Jesus/Holy Spirit?

OK – let's take a couple of minutes to do that. And also capture your thoughts – you can write them down on the insert that says “Why I (heart) BCCC - 2018” and place in the offering plate when the offering is collected.



<<TIME – A COUPLE OF MINUTES – ask people to shout out the “whys”

I am looking forward to seeing your responses - I'll compile today's list that you all come up with and email this to you and make hard copies available next week. That way we'll all have a collection of why folks love BCCC. It's like having a cheat sheet to remind us what we can share with the world out there about where and how we experience God and Jesus and the Holy Spirit! AND when the opportunity offers itself – we are ready! When I served as a Trustee at Pacific School of Religion – all of us Trustees participated in a workshop where we created our own “Elevator Speech”. A Minute long “speech” about what's great about this seminary so we were always prepared to talk about PSR!

Preparation is everything! We'll be ready whenever an opportunity offers itself...We won't have to stutter! That's part of how his coach helped King George deliver his very stirring speech that the entire nation heard during World War II.

- What kind of opportunity you might ask? We won't be asked to deliver a speech like that!
- The thing is - You never know when God happens!
- You might hear a friend talk about how they have been disillusioned about church, etc...

- BE Opened – Ephatha! You have your list – you can say – well – my church isn’t like that – come with me sometime!



You know – it occurs to me that THAT is another reason we love BCCC – that so many in our BCCC family love BCCC in different ways! Dear ones, THESE are the glimpses of Jesus in our midst! Ephatha! Be opened! Take a look around you today – in worship and after – at the farewell reception for Kenny and Petty. They’ve been with us only a few years but there is a bond, isn’t there? Beyond language...they are a part of this BCCC family even when they are back in Hong Kong – That love that binds us – that is a glimpse of Jesus in our midst! Remember? That is how we welcome new members – we pledge to share the glimpses of Jesus in our midst! We can share among our friends AND Kenny and Petty can share wherever they are! Ephatha – Be opened! Today, tomorrow and always!

Let us pray.

O God, you have the gift to open up the ears of the deaf, the eyes of the blind, even the tightest of lives, work on us. Free us from whatever it is that has us bound up that we might become truly free people ready to serve you and share you with hearts that are wide open, willing and joy-filled. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.