

Text: Mark 7:31-37 (Pentecost 16, Series B, September 9, 2018)

Theme: Unbegrudging Grace.

Virtue (basic truth): With a heart of compassion, Jesus proves his sovereign grace for all.

Malady (our problem): Sinners begrudge evidence of God's undeserved love in other's lives.

Telic Note (goal): By means of this sermon, the Spirit of Grace opens hearts to realize and give thanks for the grace of God we've been given, and he moves us to confess him for it!

Propositional Statement (aim): Social media is always a *presentation-reception* format; it depend on that. We present what's good and other people meet that. Even more wonderfully, grace is always the same way. God presents his goodness – to us and others; and faith receives that with praise for his *unbegrudging grace*.

Specific Law in Text: implied in how we perceive God's grace to others.

Specific Gospel in Text: "He has done everything well" (Mark 31:37 – such profound gospel!)

Doctrinal Thought: Jesus is the Son of God who displays power over sins' every consequence.

Sanctification Thought: *"Gracious Savior, you have a heart of compassion for those who don't know you . . . and for those who do. Thank you, dear Friend, for your Word of Grace that has opened ears to hear your Word and lips to proclaim it. Bless me with a happy contentment in your gifts to me and a healthy appreciation of your gifts to others. In all, let your unbegrudged grace bring you glory and praise. In your name I pray. Amen!"*

Mark 7:31-37

Then Jesus left the vicinity of Tyre and went through Sidon, down to the Sea of Galilee and into the region of the Decapolis. ³² There some people brought to him a man who was deaf and could hardly talk, and they begged Jesus to place his hand on the man.

³³ After he took him aside, away from the crowd, Jesus put his fingers into the man's ears. Then he spit and touched the man's tongue. ³⁴ He looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him, "Ephphatha!" (which means "Be opened!"). ³⁵ At this, the man's ears were opened, his tongue was loosened and he began to speak plainly.

³⁶ Jesus commanded them not to tell anyone. But the more he did so, the more they kept talking about it. ³⁷ People were overwhelmed with amazement. "He has done everything well," they said. "He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak."

God's power. God's promise. God's praise. All evident for our hearts to celebrate as Mark thrills to relay: "*the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God*" (Mark 1:1). Alleluia and Amen!

By this point in our togetherness, most of you know I don't delve into the world of social media. Certainly not against it; obviously, I don't think it's evil. So, if you fancy yourself a Facebook-er, or identify yourself as an or Instagram-er; if you consider yourself Pinterist-ing or are still happily confined to MySpace, that's all well, totally fine – you're not doing anything wrong.

But this morning, let's identify this reality: every form of social media has a double-sided projection. On the one side – the side of the post-er – everything is made out to be good (for the most part): life is beautiful, work is fantastic, vacation first-class, food exquisite, relationships flourishing, dog is unparalleled. Accurate or not, that's the type of front most prefer to portray.

Realize, though, that a display *from* is also meant *for*; and that's the second projection – that those who *follow* and *friend* are actually happy for the individuals. A *like* clicked, an emoji inserted, a bitmoji animated all to express total and complete approval that maybe isn't as accurate. A promotion . . . for which I'm just as qualified. A win . . . for which I'm just as deserving. An advancement I will applaud with a full-pixeled GIF ***begrudging grace***.

Let's use that social media recognition to move this sermon spiritual. And, maybe I'll just ask the question: do you struggle with an envious appreciation in our Gospel lesson (Mark 7:31-37)? The account is stellar. Someone to retell it? A man who can't hear or speak is brought to Jesus. In powerful grace and in gracious power, Jesus touches, spits, speaks, and the man's healed – completely and fully. Two impediments. Two activities. One word. *Ephphatha*, and the once-deaf hears wholly, the once-mute speaks completely. Amazing!

He's healed! Of course, we smile at that . . . even though, inwardly, we wonder why Jesus doesn't deal with us that way. Problems alleviated! Of course, we applaud that . . . even though, inwardly, we're well aware of our so-many problems that remain. "*He has done everything well*" (Mark 7:37)! Of course, we agree . . . even as we consider the so-many exemptions that imply the opposite in our lives, in our families, in our relationships, and in our neighborhood. Of course, for the Savior's hand in that man's life we respond, *Praise be to you, O Christ!* . . . even though that accolade merely masks the jealous envy and envious jealousy in our hearts. We project the front that we're happy for the man; in reality, a host of *unresolved-s* churns inside us.

Friends, if that's how we meet the good news of God's Son from Mark 7, or if that's at all how we meet God's grace in the lives of others: stop it. And if we're somehow prone to think this lesson's focus is on the once-deaf-mute: stop it. And by the Spirit's work on our hearts, let's pray we learn to meet it with the same ***unbegrudging grace*** as Jesus and see him! Heaven help.

To get there, let's identify the true tragedy; because it's not one we'd presume – that's part of it, not all of it. You tell me, from the lesson, what was the man's problem? He “*was deaf and could hardly talk*” (Mark 7:32). Right; we'll acknowledge the frustration of those impediments. A world of music; to which we're deaf. A word to speak, but for which our tongue won't move. Won't ignore that's sad; in fact, we'd likely donate toward that *Go-Fund-Me* page.

But there's a deeper problem. He couldn't hear. Which means the message of the Messiah who was passing through his own hometown was mute to him. His ears did not work to hear the Rabbi rumored to heal the sick and expel the demons. He couldn't comprehend the commotion or understand the truth of the Teacher who spoke with authority and grace. He couldn't absorb the Savior's sermons – or read the manuscript; his tongue didn't even work to ask a question.

Deeper problem, bigger problem, was that his physical handicap resulted in spiritual detriment. Whether those that brought him recognized that reality or not, we don't know. But, “*there some people brought to him a man who was deaf and could hardly talk, and they begged him to place his hand on the man*” (Mark 7:32). The man needed help he couldn't give himself; and they brought him to Stranger passing through, who happens to be the Great Physician!

In a beautiful combination of compassion and concern, so as not to embarrass or frustrate him before others with declarations he couldn't understand, Jesus deals with him individually and in love. He takes the man aside and, with a sign-language of fingers the man could perceive, Jesus looks to heaven and . . . sighs (Mark 7:33). Why? Not ***begrudging grace*** as if it's impossible. Not ***begrudging grace*** as if it's burdensome. Jesus sighs over sin's consequence and the devil's damage. Jesus sighs, not ***begrudging grace***, but he sighs with profound sympathy for sinners.

But one word opens ears and unshackles the tongue. *Ephphatha!* And they were. Ears opened to hear the soul-healing news found in Christ alone. Ears opened to hear, for the first time, forgiveness isn't abstract – it's the reality found in Jesus. Ears opened to hear the good news sign-language could not convey: there is a God; he is powerful; he does care. Mouth opened to thank and praise and adore and confess. *Ephphatha* – a word of God's ***unbegrudging grace!***

And even at that perfect display of our Jesus' deity as God's Son, with a full focus on him, we smile and think, “*good grace for that man . . . but what about for me? Why doesn't Jesus ever just pull me aside and speak to my need with a word, to my condition with a command?*”

But even before that taunt rises, friends, realize that, in ***unbegrudging grace***, the Savior still does! In words more beautiful than ancient Aramaic, from lips divine and a heart perfect, from the promise of a cross and echo of a tomb, in the whisper of his Word, he still speaks, still says:

- *Forgiven . . .* as he reminds you not one misstep or sin is held against you;

- *Redeemed* . . . as he assures you your debt has been paid, your soul is secure;
- *Heir* . . . as he promises you that your eternity is sure, your after-death determined;
- *Sufficient* . . . as he guarantees his undeserved love for you always is;
- *Complete* . . . as he speaks of his control in the chaos of your life;
- *Perfect* . . . as he reminds you of the plans he has for your every season;
- *Respite* . . . as he pulls your heart to the quiet of his Word still meant for you to hear.

Friends, the big focus on Mark 7 is not on the healed; it's not really even on the healing. It's on the Heal-er, and the One who, in amazing compassion, still extends his ***unbegudging grace*** to each of us. The once-deaf got to hear the message of salvation found only in Jesus, got perceive the Savior's grace on full display. We do, too! He's opened our ears that message, too! Once-mute got to acclaim Christ as Lord. So, do we! He's loosened our tongue for that same praise!

In absolutely every way, Jesus is a sensational Savior – obviously! But Jesus has no interest in sheer sensationalism. What I mean is that Jesus wasn't concerned how many followers he had for the mere sake of numbers; nor was his greatest concern how he was projected to the society – would be people like him, approve, applaud? His greatest concern – then and now – are the individual souls of the world for whom he came. And, since the time wasn't right then, that's why he told the crowds to keep this miracle silent. *“But the more he did so, the more they kept talking about it. People were overwhelmed with amazement. ‘He has done everything well,’ they said. ‘He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak’”* (Mark 7:36b, 37).

And there it is. ***Unbegudging grace*** projected from him for sinners; and praise of it is wildly evident in the lives of those who get to witness it. *“He has done everything well”* (Mark 7:37) – that's profound and true! And he did it for him and for them and for us and for . . . you! Friends, that's not just sensational; even better and even more gracious: that's our Savior!

Moment we hear that, we receive the same blessing. In love, Jesus deals in ***unbegudging grace***. All we have and all we enjoy – from our forgiveness to our food, from our health to our homes, from our energy to our eternity – is a marvelous gift from him for us – as are whatever blessings that are evident from him for others. And, by the Spirit's power, our mouths get speak and respect and thank and praise and appreciate his ***unbegudging grace*** to us and to others.

Sometimes, what's presented on social media is accurate; sometimes it's true; sometimes it's not. But our Savior isn't just accurate; he's perfect. He's not just true; he's the truth. Always. And his unbegudging grace is amazing. Always. God bless us with a happy contentment in the grace he's given us, and a happy appreciation of the grace he's given others. So that in all of it we get to say with a full-hearted smile: *Praise be to you, O Christ!*

Alleluia and Amen!