

An elderly man stopped at a hearing aid center and asked about prices.

"We have them from \$25,000 on down to \$1.50," the salesman said. "What's the \$25,000 one like?" asked the elderly man.

"Well, it translates three languages and is the latest in electronics," the salesman replied.

"And what about the one for \$1.50?" the customer asked.

"It's this button attached to a string," said the salesman, pushing it across the counter.

"How does it work?" asked the customer.

"It doesn't," said the salesman, "But if you put the button in your ear and the string in your pocket, you'll be surprised how loud people will talk."

(For the third time, chicken)

I swear, when I turned 55 my wife began to mumble.

Okay, you get the theme. We're talking about deafness. We laugh, but many times its not funny. In mild cases it is an annoyance; in more severe cases it can lead to social isolation.

When Jesus encountered the man who was deaf and had an impediment in his speech he found it anything but funny. In the gospels Jesus never encounters brokenness and leaves without first making it whole, and this was no exception. Mark, the evangelist, tells us:: "And taking him aside from the multitude privately, (Jesus) put his fingers into his ears, and he spat and touched his tongue; and looking up to heaven, he sighed, and said to him, 'Ephphatha' that is, 'Be opened.' And his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly.

There are here three things of note:

First, it is not surprising that the man was afflicted with both deafness and a speech impediment. You know what difficulty a person has in speaking who has been deaf from birth. Because they can't hear others speak or hear how themselves sound their words come out with great difficulty many times difficult

to understand. When the man's ears were unplugged, his tongue would be naturally released as well. Now that he could hear, he could also speak.

Second, I think that when Jesus said "Ephphatha, be opened", he was speaking not only to the man's ears, but also to his mouth. That's why Jesus touched both the man's ears and his tongue.

Third, when the many received his hearing, he could not help but speak. No encouragement was necessary.

Last Sunday Barney and I had a discussion about the importance of listening. It might be argued that God gave us two ears and one mouth because he expects us to listen twice as much as to talk. I think that is a very good rule of thumb. But what if we just listen and never talk. What if we allow Jesus to touch our ears but never our lips.

In our Bible study class on Romans each lesson is headed by a question. For example, "Saved by Grace...Isn't That Too Good to be True?" and "Where is God in My Suffering?" In my Pastor's Perspective in the July newsletter I introduced this study and listed all six session questions. Our secretary, Carolyn (my wife) dutifully typed my article for publication. She came to the question for Session Five "How can I keep from singing?" and believing that to be my typographical error, changed it to what she thought the question really was: "How can I keep from sinning?" Being a life long Lutheran, immersed for a lifetime in Lutheran guilt, confession and repentance, this made a lot more sense.

But, in reality, the question indeed was "How can I keep from singing?" It reflected on Romans 10 in which Paul exhorts his readers to tell others of the gospel. You have heard the good news. How can you keep it to yourselves? How can you keep from telling others?

The relevant verses in Romans 10 are ¹⁴But how are men to call upon 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 a preacher? ¹⁵And how can men preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are

the feet of those who preach good news!"...¹⁷ So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ.

"Ephphatha; be opened" is a command to both ears and lips. Hear the gospel; speak the gospel.

Okay, here comes the guilt trip. Here comes the part of the sermon that, quite frankly, I don't like, but it has to be said to set up the ending.

You know what I'm going to say. We Lutherans have for as long as I can remember not been very good and speaking the gospel outside the church walls. As the old joke goes, What do you get when you cross and Lutheran with a Jehovah's Witness? Someone who knocks on your door and then has nothing to say. That would be funny if it weren't so true?

What stops us from singing? What stops us from expressing the incredible joy we have in knowing Christ and being loved by him? I've heard answers but not good answers. Let's look at them.

I've been offended by those Bible-thumping, soul-saving weirdoes on big city street corners and I don't appreciate the aggressive knock-on-your-door at dinner time groups. My response: the answer to poor evangelism is not no evangelism.

I'm Scandinavian and we don't get excited or express ourselves very much. My response: I bet that half the fans in the stands at the Humbert Humphrey Dome in Minneapolis are Scandinavian and, when it comes to the Vikings, they get very excited and expressive.

I don't want to force my beliefs on others. My response: Come election time these same people want very much to force their beliefs, Democrat or Republican, on others.

"I let my life be my Christian witness." These folks have their own hymn: "They'll know we are Christians by our Love." My response: No they won't. Loving and serving others does not identify you as a Christian. There are many service groups in our community made up of both Christians and non-Christians who do loving things for needy people in the Estes Valley as well as in other countries. I

belonged to one such organization that stopped having a blessing before the club meal so as not to offend non-believing members. Any yet they do wonderful, loving service. People won't know you are Christian unless you somehow say so.

Okay, the scolding is over. Now for the good part. Speaking the faith is easy. You don't have to memorize four key questions, like the Four Spiritual Laws. You don't have to be confrontational like asking, "If you die today do you know if you will go to heaven?" Speaking the faith can be as simple as introducing a faith-based idea or experience and see where it leads. The Holy Spirit does the rest.

When someone says to me, "Hey, Reverend, what's the good news?" My answer is "Jesus is Risen." Not "I'm going on vacation or I'm getting a new granddaughter." Good news is "Jesus is Risen." I admit that does give some people pause. Or on a Sunday morning at McDonald's as I leave to come to church someone will say, "Give 'em hell, Reverend." My response is, "I'd rather given them heaven." One of those encounters led to a more serious discussion about the faith.

Think about it. Who was the first person to share the word of Christ with you? Think of other people who have nurtured your faith by sharing the good news with you. Were these people theologians or masters of Bible? Did they enter into a debate with you to convince you of the truth and value of the faith?

I doubt it. I bet they were average Christians who simply said what they believed and have experienced and let the Holy Spirit do the rest.

Jesus said, "Ephphatha" which means "Be opened." May he touch not only our ears but our lips as well. Amen.

May the peace of God that passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in and through Christ Jesus. Amen.