

[THE HEALING OF THE DEAF-MUTE MAN. LUTHER EMPHASIZES THAT NO ONE CAN BELIEVE FOR SOMEONE ELSE, BUT THEY CAN HELP A PERSON TO HAVE A FAITH OF THEIR OWN BY PRAYER AND GOOD WORKS.] (BRINGING THE PERSON TO CHRIST).

Sermon for the Twelfth Sunday after Trinity; Mark 7:31-37

A Sermon by Martin Luther; taken from his Church Postil.

1. Dearly Beloved: I hope you thoroughly understand this Gospel, for it is plain. However, as we have but one old story to preach, and since it is so precious and cannot be sufficiently considered, we will apply our text also to this old story, and briefly speak of faith and love. In the first place, we will look at the simple story of the text itself; then, if time permit, we will also speak a little of its spiritual meaning.

PART I. THE STORY OR EXAMPLE ITSELF.

2. First, the story or example before us is good in itself, for here we see that many persons received the poor man, as though his distress were their own, bringing him to Jesus to be helped. By this, both faith and love are shown to us. Faith, in that they had heard of the Lord before, that he was kind and compassionate, and helped all those who came to him. For the Word must first have been heard, and must first have entered the human heart, showing us the mercy of God in such a way that we depend upon it. Therefore the Word of Christ must here also have taught these people this; otherwise, where it does not come, there faith and works are all in vain.

3. And though this gospel lesson, like the preceding one, does not state that they had previously heard the tidings of the Gospel, yet we must nevertheless conclude, and the fact proves it, that they must have previously heard the good tidings and Gospel of Christ the Lord, through which they believed. For that is properly the Gospel which is called good tidings, a good report, not that which is written on paper, but that which is proclaimed in the world and becomes known by the living voice. Thus doubtless they had heard that Christ was kind, friendly, and helpful, willing to aid everybody; this was the beginning of their faith. Thus you must earnestly search the Gospel, and you will always find, that the tidings must first go forth and lead us to God, in order that he may lay the first stone; otherwise, all is lost. In the next place, you will learn that because they have clung to the tidings and trusted them for their comfort, they went thither, and hoped to receive of him what they had heard.

4. Now you here observe the nature of faith which grows out of the Word. For the Word first sets forth to us the mercy and goodness of God; then faith causes us to cleave unto it with a firm

confidence, and to obey the Word. For we are now conscious of this in our hearts, and are satisfied; for as soon as we believe, we are already with Christ in this inheritance, and are justified.

5. In the third place, this Gospel lesson describes the works of love in this, that these people go and care for the poor man, just as Christ, without their merit, and without their doing, sends forth his Word, and spreads abroad his goodness and mercy. Thus as they have laid hold and drank from the fountain, they again flow forth freely, and also impart themselves to their neighbour freely and without any merit. Thus love should do its work, not as though it needs it, but devotes itself solely to the benefit of its neighbour, as Paul, among other things, speaks to the Corinthians about love, 1. Cor. 13:5: "Love seeketh not its own"; and to the Philippians he says, Phil. 2:4: "Not looking each of you to his own things, but each of you also to the things of others."

6. This we may also learn here in these good people. They do not need this work themselves, nor do they look to themselves, but to the poor man, and think how they may help him; they seek no reward, but act independently and freely. Thus you should by right do likewise; if not, you are no Christians. Therefore consider carefully how love is here described, that it takes upon itself the care of others. If we accept this lesson, it will be well for us; but if not, then God will punish us with blindness, as he has been doing, to our grief, for nearly four hundred years. This much we say briefly concerning faith and love. Furthermore, we must now, in the fourth place, treat of the faith of other persons.

7. You know the fundamental truth is, that man cannot be just and acceptable before God, save alone by faith. So that they have lied and spoken falsely who have taught heretofore that we may deal with God through our works. Moreover it was much more foolish that they taught us to rely upon the works and faith of other persons, pretending that nuns, monks and priests can help other persons by their wailing which they perform in their cloisters at night, and that in this manner they can help other people and distribute their treasures. Therefore, let everyone here remember, that no one dare undertake to be saved by the faith, or by the work of another person; in truth, it cannot be done by the faith or work of Mary, or of any saint, yea, not even by Christ's work and faith, but through your own personal faith. For God will not permit Mary, or any other saint, not even Christ himself, to take your place, in order that you might be godly and righteous, unless you believe for your own self. If Christ's faith and work will not do it, you will much less accomplish it by the work or faith of all the monks and priests. Hence our Gospel lesson gives us an occasion to speak of the faith of others. For here we read that they led this person to Christ in their own faith and work; the man did nothing toward it, but merely suffered it to be done.

8. Therefore let everybody mark well, that he can never be saved through another person's faith. But it of course may happen, that by the faith of other persons you may be brought to a faith of your own. Likewise the good works of other persons may be of service to me to obtain works of my own. Therefore those lie, who declare that we may be saved through the works or faith of other persons, whether we ourselves believe or not. No, this is not so! Unless you yourself draw out from God's kindness and mercy a faith of your own, you will not be saved. Thus it must be; otherwise no other person's faith or works avail, not even Christ, though he is the Saviour of all the world; his kindness, his help will do you no good whatever, unless you believe in it, and are enlightened by it.

9. Therefore, by all means beware of the preachers whom you have often heard among the monks, who approach a dying person and say: "Behold, my brave fellow, do not despair; if you have committed sins, be sorry for them; but in order that you may fare so much the better, I will make you a present of my righteous life and my good works." If now, the dying, person accept such a gift, he is as much a fool as the other, and with all these works, he will go to the devil. Therefore, beware of such consolation, and say: If you are willing to serve me with your good works, approach God and speak thus: O heavenly Father, by thy grace I am now believing; therefore, I pray thee, my God, give also unto this poor man a faith of his own. This might help me; but that you would give me your own faith, this you cannot do, neither would it help me. You will have enough to do to be saved by your own faith.

10. This you may see in the case of the foolish virgins, who, when their lamps went out, said unto the wise virgins: "Give us of your oil; for our lamps are going out." Then did the wise ones answer and say: "Peradventure there will not be enough for us and you." Mat. 25:8-9. In that case I am in need even of more faith for myself; how then could I share it with another? For my own faith must stand before God's judgment, and must fight so hard and cleave so firmly to God's mercy, that the sweat will run down its face, if it is to prevail. That is the true meaning of St. Peter's words, 1. Pet. 4-18. "The righteous is scarcely saved, where then shall the ungodly appear?" For when death makes its onslaught, then such fear and agony will seize him, that he can scarcely with all his strength, stand for himself and be kept in faith. Hence it is greatly to be deplored that they have established so much deception, putting monks' cowls upon the dead, and inventing other foolish things, by which they led poor souls straightway to perdition. Beware of them.

11. Now this I say, that you may know how far the faith of others may be of use to us, and how your own faith can help you. Other people's merits will help you to attain a merit of your own, and nothing more. And though all the angels, yea, the mercy of God itself, were ready to stand for you, it would avail you nothing, unless you cleave unto it with a faith of your own. But it may effect this, that it will assist you to obtain a faith of your own, which will help you. Furthermore, even if Christ did die for us, and pledged and gave his body and life, blood and flesh for us, and became our advocate; yet it would avail nothing, unless we believe in him. But he can assist us in this way, that he appears before the Father and says: "O Father, this have I done for mankind; do thou give them faith, in order that they may enjoy it." This then, will help us, if we feel assured that his works and merit are our own. In the same manner one should also speak of the other saints, that no saint's intercession and merit avail unless we ourselves believe. You observe this also in our lesson. There lies the poor man, unable either to speak or to hear. They who bring him to the Lord can speak and hear. But they cannot make him speak by their hearing and speaking, and even though they all had come near him and said: "We will speak and hear for you"; yet he would, in spite of this, have remained speechless and deaf continually, and would never have been able to speak.

12. Likewise, if I were to give you a written declaration saying: "Go forth, this is my work; this shall be yours"; yet it will not help you a whit, but it will carry you into hell. In what way, then, will it help you? If I do, as these men do, who come to Christ and say: "O Lord, help this poor man, that he may receive his speech!" They do not say: "We will hear and speak in your stead," but they pray that Christ himself would give him speech. Likewise, if you take my part, and use your faith in such a way that it may help me to a faith of my own, this might help me; thus! thus it must be! God be

thanked! Otherwise, no work nor any brotherhood, will avail.

13. Therefore say: I must neither rely upon your works nor you upon mine; but I will, by my own faith, pray God to give you a faith of your own. This is what is said, that we all are priests and kings, that we, like Christ himself, may intercede for one another before God, praying for personal faith. Thus, if I happen to notice that you have no faith of your own, or a weak faith, I go and ask God to help you to obtain faith, not by giving you my faith and my works, but your own faith and your own works; so that Christ may give him all his works and salvation through faith, as, he hath given them to us by faith.

14. That is the meaning of the saying of Christ, John 16:26-27: "I say not unto you that I will pray the Father for you; for the Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came forth from the Father." This is a beautiful addition, as though he would say: I have prayed for you, and have entreated God that he would give you what is mine. Therefore know my name. For through my prayer he has accepted you and has given you faith, so that henceforth you may pray for yourselves, and I need not do it; provided that you do it in my name. Here he has crowned us, dedicated and anointed us with the Holy Spirit, so that we all are priests in Christ, and may exercise the priest's office, go before God and pray for one another. This is what St. Peter means in writing thus in his First Epistle, 2:9-10: "Ye are an elect race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that ye may shew forth the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light, which in time past were no people, but now are the people of God; which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy."

15. Hence we may all say: Christ was my priest, who prayed for me and purchased faith and the Spirit for me; therefore I am also a priest, and must go on praying in the world, that God may give faith also to this and that person. So we conclude, that we shall obtain whatever we earnestly pray for in the true faith, as the Lord says, John 16:24: "Ask, and ye shall receive."

16. But to pray powerfully is not within our strength; for the Spirit does not always vouchsafe to us to pray with power. Paul prayed that all Israel might be saved, Rom. 9:1f; why did it not come to pass? The difference lies in the faith, for the Spirit did not give it to him; had he been able to add this faith, it would surely have come to pass. For if Paul had said, "I pray for all Israel," and had believed and said: "Lord, I am certain that thou wilt do it," then it would certainly have come to pass. But though he often prayed for them from his heart, the Spirit did not vouchsafe to him that he should confidently believe it. Therefore it is not within our power to pray in strong confidence; the Holy Spirit does it. Whenever we pray for anyone and are able to add, "It will be done," then it will certainly be done; but whenever we pray, we must add, "Thy will be done." If, then, I must let it go according to his will, I cannot suggest to him either the person, or the time, or the manner, but must freely leave it all to him; then, indeed, I am sure of it. In this manner Christ acted also, who himself prayed thus: "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass away from me," but at once added: "Nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt." Mat.26:39.

17. Therefore, when I am to pray for an entire city or community, I ought to say: "O Father, I pray for all of them." Nevertheless, however, I must give honour to his name or will, and say: "Dear

Father, I pray for these; I know it is thy will, that I should pray, that I should not despise prayer; but thy will shall be done always; for I might ask something for some one who is not worthy of it before thee; or again, I might possibly cast aside some one who is worthy; therefore do thou act according to thy divine will, for thou wilt certainly do better than I could ever conceive." Thus you see that we cannot always add these words: It will be so. But if we are certain in our hearts that we may add: "It will be certainly so," then it will come to pass.

18. This we see in our text. These people approach the Lord in strong confidence, praying for the poor man, and their prayer is also heard. In the same manner, when baptism is performed we see this take place in the children's faith. There are the infants, bare and naked in body and soul, having neither faith nor works. Then the Christian Church comes forward and prays, that God would pour faith into the child; not that our faith should help the child, but that it may obtain a faith of its own. If it has faith, then after that whatever it does is well done, whether it suckle its mother's breast, or whether it soil itself, or whatever it may please to do. But if it does not obtain faith, our faith is of no value to the child.

19. Therefore my faith can help you in no way except that it may assist you to obtain a faith of your own. Hence, to sum up all, everything depends upon personal faith, as strong as it is, so much does it need the faith and prayer of other people in order to increase in strength. Now you can easily judge, that those people were the greatest fools, who held masses and vigils with the brotherhoods; for the wise virgins have sufficient oil only for themselves, and scarcely have enough. This is a simple explanation of the Story of the Gospel lesson. Now let us briefly consider the meaning which our Lord puts into it.

PART II. THE SPIRITUAL MEANING.

20. The people bring the poor man to the Lord, the Lord takes him to a special the man's ears, spits, and touches his tongue with the spittle, looks tip toward heaven, and sighing, says, Ephphata, that is, Be opened! This is a lovely picture, and its meaning is good. For by those who here bring the deafmute to the Lord, the office of the ministry is meant. Ministers and the Apostles lead the poor consciences of men to God. This is done in three ways, by preaching, by a godly life, and by intercession. With the Word and preaching, they are brought to God; a godly life serves to show the Word so much the mightier in its power. But the Word itself leads to Christ, though it be preached by a sinner. Yet, a good life serves as an emphasis and a furtherance of the Gospel; while a wicked life dulls its edge. Their third duty, to pray for the people, likewise leads them on the road both to faith and to works.

21. Now if the Word go on its way in this threefold manner, it cannot fail to bring forth fruit, as God says, Is. 55:11: "My Word, that goeth forth out of my mouth, shall not return to me void." This is indicated by the action of the pious persons who carry the mute into Christ's presence; this signifies the ministers, who bring forward the sinner; then God appears, giving growth and increase, as Paul says, 1. Cor. 3:7, He opens the sinner's eyes, ears, and mouth. This happens in a wink of the eye, for God's Word is like lightning, which in a moment passes from sunrise to the ends of the earth. Thus when such persons are brought to God, he gives them grace to believe.

22. This is signified by the act of laying his fingers into the man's ears; through the Word he breathes the Holy Spirit into him, making the heart believing, decent, chaste, and holy; for the finger signifies the Holy Spirit.

23. Again, the spittle that is laid on the man's tongue, typifies the Word of God; this is put into his mouth in order that he may be able to speak it. And this spittle, the Word of God, is a noble thing, but very bitter to the Old Adam.

24. Then they praise God, saying: "He hath done all things well, he has made the deaf to hear and the dumb to speak." For wherever there is true faith, there the Spirit will not allow you any rest; you will break forth, become a priest, teach other people also, as we read Ps. 116:10: "I believe, for I will speak." There the heart is full, and the mouth must run over. Then when they are persecuted, they will not care.

25. But the part of the story, that Christ took the man apart from the others, looks up to heaven, has this meaning: If God do not take me alone to a separate place, and give me the Holy Spirit, so that I cling to the Word which I have heard, then all preaching is in vain. But why does this require so much that he looks up to heaven and makes use of divine power, calling upon God's grace to come and to act? By this he teaches us that such power must come from heaven, working in the heart of man by divine strength; then help comes to him. Again the spittle which is the Word of God is a noble thing for the Old Adam. Then they go forth to praise and glorify God.

26. Thus have you learned, from the story and from its spiritual or secret meaning, that we must first hear the Word of God and thus, through the intercession of Christ, obtain a faith of our own, and then we come out, confessing this and praising God forever. May this be sufficient on this Gospel lesson. Let us pray to God for grace.

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