



## The Nourishing Vocation Project Engaging the Living Word

*The Man who could not Hear or Speak - [Mark 7:31-37](#)*

### What is this particular text?

- Story
- Miracle / Healing narrative
  - Speech and Hearing
- Boundary crossing / rejection of taboos
  - Prejudice against people with disabilities
  - Jesus touches someone who is “unclean”
- Revelation
  - The miracle serves to reveal who Jesus is
  - Parallels the healing of the blind man in [Mark 8:22-26](#)

### How does the text function within the scriptural story?

- Continues the themes of seeing and hearing introduced in [Mark 4:12](#)
- Seeing and hearing Jesus are both literal and metaphorical
- Messianic secret
- Jesus is the fulfillment of the prophecies in the Hebrew Scriptures
- Jesus ushers in the Messianic age; his actions demonstrate that this is so
- Results of Jesus’ own openness from his encounter with the Syrophenician woman

### How can this text function in the church today?

- Functions as a mirror
  - When/what/who do we not “hear?”
  - When/what/who do we impede from speaking?”
- Invitation / expectation to continue crossing boundaries and rejecting taboos
  - What boundaries need to be erased today?
  - What taboos keep people away from the good news today?
- Invitation to center voices that are not often heard
- The man is brought to Jesus. What does it mean, look like, to bring people to Jesus today?
- Challenge to be open to God’s call today

### What does the text do to you? How do you react to the text? What feelings does this text engender in you?

- Makes me think of my own inability to metaphorically hear
- Brings to mind times in my own life when I have needed to be open
- Confronts me with my own difficulty with being open to things that are different or unfamiliar
- Curiosity about the “Messianic secret” – tell no one
  - Sometimes we take this way too literally
- Caution signs – not to create unfaithful expectations
- Caution signs – not to look at human difference as “less than” that needs to be fixed
- Caution signs – ableism

### **What do you have to say to the text?**

- The call to “be open” feels like both Law and Gospel
- It is curious that the interaction between Jesus and the man happens in private
- Touch is so important: how do we talk about good touch in a society where touch has so often been weaponized?
- This is a very embodied miracle
- It is indeed astounding

### **What do you see through this text from the story itself?**

- Human need
- The community is essential: the man is brought to Jesus
- It is hard to be open on your own
- Embodiment matters
- Jesus words (and touch) become enfleshed in the man

### **What do you see from within your church/community/world? (2022)**

- Seeing and hearing those who are “outside” is a perpetual challenge and invitation
- Openness is both learned and gifted
- How do we “bring people to Jesus” without manifesting a colonial attitude?
- How is the church closed?
- Who does the church neither see nor hear?
- Whose voices does the church impede?
- Crises of our current time
  - Ableism
  - Centering dominant voices and decentering marginalized voices

### **What do you see within yourself?**

- The times when openness has been a gift
- The times when openness has been a challenge
- The times when it has been hard for me to find the right words to say

### **What is the context – textual and historical?**

- Follows Jesus declaring all foods clean
- Immediately preceded by Jesus exchange with the Syrophenician woman and Jesus’ expansion of his own self-understanding and ministry
- Precedes the feeding of the four thousand
- Relates to the healing of the blind man in [8:22-26](#)
- Leads up to Peter’s declaration at [Caesarea Philippi](#)

### **What questions does this text raise for you?**

- How do we talk about healing stories without being ableist?
- How do we center the experience of the man?
- The man does not speak for himself. How can we carefully tend to “nothing about me without me” in our own faith communities?
- Who is the church (metaphorically) in this story? Those who bring the man? The man? The crowd?
- Where are our needs for openness today?



- What is it that keeps us closed?

**What words/themes seem of particular import?**

- Brought to him
- Companionship
- Begged him
- Private
- Touched
- Ephphatha
- Opened/released

**What is the Gospel / transforming Good News within this text?**

- God calls us to openness
- Jesus meets our needs in private
- Jesus opens us up
- Jesus is not afraid to touch us
- Jesus crosses boundaries
- Jesus healing power is embodied

**What is the as-over-againstness of this text?**

- We are closed
- We struggle to hear
- We struggle to speak
- We prevent others from hearing and speaking
- We center powerful voices
- Embodying the Gospel is hard

**Who does this text say that Jesus is, or if not Jesus, then who does this text say that God is? What does this text say about God?**

- One who hears and sees
- One who touches
- One who prays/asks God
- One who gives direction
- One whose ministry is both public and private
- Open who is open
- Open who calls to openness

**What have others said about this text?**

- [“Be opened.’ He sighs. Is the sigh ironic?](#) Is it Jesus sharing the joke with God? As in, ‘Okay, Father, I get it. Listen. Learn. *Be opened.* I hear you. I’m working on it.” Debbie Thomas
- [“If I was to move from the literal story](#) to the level of allegory and metaphor, there seems to be wonderful pathway of spiritual experience outlined in this miracle.” Peter Woods.
- [“Inclusion continually softens all boundaries,](#) reaching deeply into the soul and expanding widely into the world, growing more profoundly in both directions, within, without, loving God and neighbor.” Suzanne Guthrie

**What will I teach or proclaim?**

- Jesus gives voice to those whose voices are often not heard



- Jesus embodies healing and wholeness
- Jesus calls you to be opened
- Jesus crosses boundaries
- The Word of God is embodied and enacted
- Jesus calls us to act on behalf of others
- Jesus is the fulfillment of God's promises for the world

