



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

