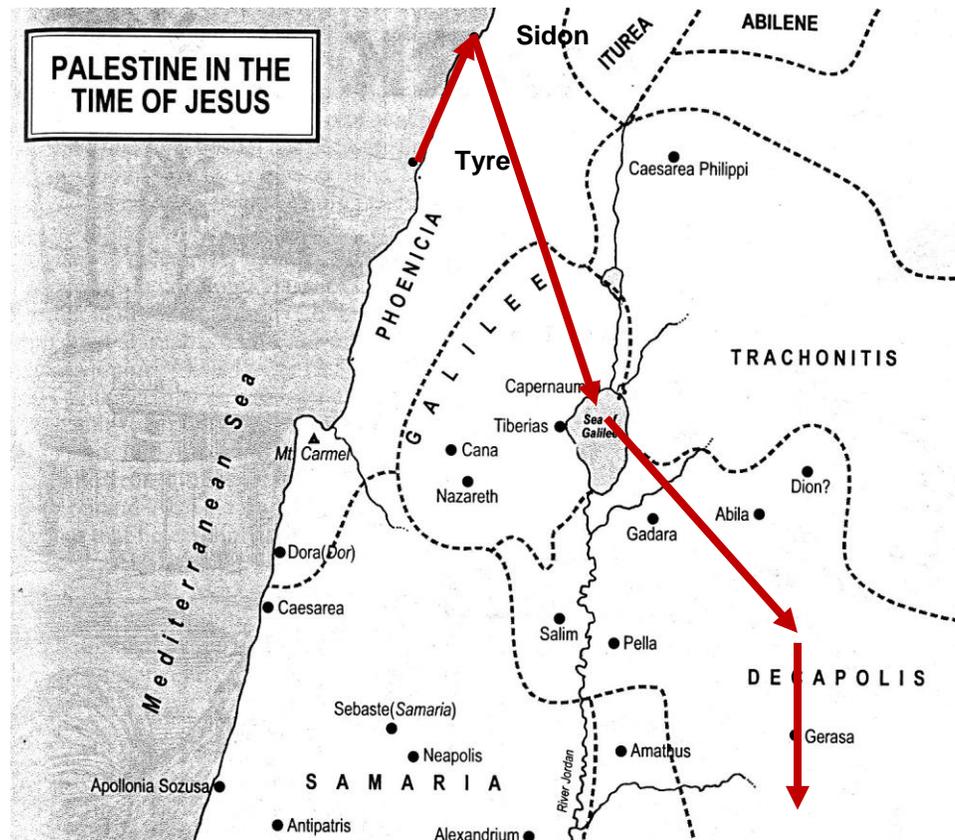


Twenty Third Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year B

Mark 7: 31 - 37



To understand today's gospel we need to appreciate the geography of this journey that Jesus and his Apostles undertook. Having left Capernaum (v 24) they travelled to Tyre. Tyre was a pagan city and there he cured the daughter of a Greek woman. (v 26 and 30)

They leave Tyre and travel north to Sidon, another pagan town. They then go to the Sea of Galilee and on into the Decapolis. (Pagan territory) In fact they go "right through the Decapolis. We can only presume that Jesus set out on this journey with the intention of preaching and helping people. Not a single thing happened on this long and tiring journey. Think of the disappointment, sense of failure, the frustration they must all have felt; all this effort and nothing to show for it. One is struck by the utter silence and absence of any achievement. No wonder Mark places the healing of a deaf and dumb man at the end of this journey.

Time now to read Mk 7: 31 – 37.

Take note of how often deafness and dumbness is mentioned.

³¹Returning from the district of Tyre, Jesus went by way of Sidon towards the Sea of Galilee, right through the Decapolis region.

³²And they brought to him **a deaf man who had an impediment in his speech**; and they asked him to lay his hands on him. ³³He took him aside in private, away from the crowd, **put his fingers into the man's ears and touched his tongue with spittle**. ³⁴Then looking up to heaven he sighed; and he said to him, "Ephphata", that is, "Be opened". ³⁵**And his ears were opened, and the ligament of his tongue was loosened and he spoke clearly**. ³⁶And Jesus ordered them to tell no one about it, but the more he insisted, the more widely they published it. ³⁷Their admiration was unbounded. "He has done all things well," they said, **"he makes the deaf hear and the dumb speak."**

There are two healings in this story. The people were also changed. We go from the total deafness and silence in verse 31 to a complete turnaround in the people. "Their admiration for was unbounded." They "widely published" what Jesus had done. This change of heart in the people is what the scriptures refer to as **"repenting."** It is refreshing to see how enthusiastically Jesus' message is received by these pagan folk. This is in stark contrast to the opposition we were told about in Jn 6: 60 – 69 on the twenty first Sunday of the year.

To understand the placing of saliva on the tongue of the dumb man we must remember that at that time saliva was considered to be the concentration of breath, it was the fullness of life. So Jesus was giving the dumb man his own breath, his Spirit.

Not only did the dumb man receive the fullness of life from Jesus, so too did the people have an experience of God present among them.

Let us pray.

Lord, we think today of the many people who live in their own closed world, unable to communicate with those around them:

- The elderly abandoned by their families,
- Young people isolated from both peers and elders,
- Immigrants who cannot hear what is being said,
- People of deep faith categorized as sinners, pagans or idolaters.

They have heard no words of love or even of respect and are impeded from sharing what is most important to them. We ask you to send us to them. Make us people like Jesus, to whom they can be brought, as the man in the gospel was brought to Jesus, to have hands laid on them so that they can hear the liberating words, "Ephphata" and their ears can be opened to hear a voice they can recognize and they can feel a human presence which will loosen the ligaments of their tongue.

Lord we ask you to open our ears so that we too may experience God, so that we may learn from Jesus as we continue our journey through the Scriptures.