

Trinity XII Sermon by Bishop Michael Hawkins

By the Right Reverend Michael W. Hawkins

Bishop of Saskatchewan

O Lord, open thou our lips, And our mouth shall show forth thy praise. Amen.

People find hearing loss a devastating experience. It makes you feel isolated and alone, especially in a crowd. It cuts you off. I know that many of us struggle on valiantly with this. And loss of speech is equally difficult. I remember a dear parishioner who was losing the ability to talk. When I visited with her, I would nervously carry on conversation, to spare her the effort of trying to speak, and me the embarrassment of not hearing her rightly. But she persisted, and I could tell by the relief on her face, when she was able to get something across to me, that her need and desire to express herself was most profound. All this is just to say that communication, however it is achieved, most commonly by hearing and speaking, is fundamental to being human. Communication defines a

Trinity XII Sermon by Bishop Michael Hawkins

relationship. Think only of how the most intimate act in which we engage with our Lord Jesus is referred to as communicating. We have communion, communication with the Lord Jesus.

Our Gospel reading is about Jesus restoring communication. This man is restored to community. It is then about how Jesus opens us up, restores us to communion with God and with one another. That restoration is based in the reconciling work of Christ. Saint Paul writes in our Epistle about these two covenants: one of the law, which leads to condemnation; and another, the covenant in Jesus' blood shed for the forgiveness of sins, which leads to reconciliation. We are the ministers of this new covenant, for God hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation.

Yet, we know brokenness in our relationship with God and with one another. We turn a deaf ear to the cries of those in need, and even to our own conscience. We plug our ears to God's Word, to his

Trinity XII Sermon by Bishop Michael Hawkins

law and Gospel. We are deaf, but worse, this deafness is deliberate, wilful and chosen. And we are dumb. How many times have we failed to speak up for someone, have we been silent to speak the truth out of fear? We are silent - no prayer, no praise, no confession of sin or faith.

You and I are the man in the story. Your relationships and mine are broken, with God and with our neighbour. But Jesus Christ has the power, if we have the faith, to heal us. Notice how our Lord takes the man aside. He is not running some kind of Las Vegas healing show. He takes the man aside. This is a moment about intimacy and communication. And he heals him first by opening his ears, then by loosing his tongue. Throughout the Gospel, hearing comes first, then speaking. Of course, we learn to speak by hearing, but more let us remember to be swift to hear and slow to speak. Until we hear, we have nothing to say.

Trinity XII Sermon by Bishop Michael Hawkins

Our tongues are meant to be loosed and mouths opened, for praise. When we have first heard the Gospel, we then are moved to praise. But as well, when we first hear the law of God, we then are moved to penitence. And when we hear the message of God, we are then moved to proclaim. Our tongues are meant to speak in Penitence, Proclamation and Praise.

Our tongues are meant to praise God and build up one another, but we use these unruly members to curse God and to cut up one another. These things ought not to be.

You and I are that man in the story. The Lord Jesus himself would restore us, he would reconcile us to God and, in himself, to one another. He would restore us to communion, communication with God and one another. So he comes to open us up, to open our minds and hearts, to open our ears and our lips. Jesus finds a way to communicate with the man, and he quietly and authoritatively

Trinity XII Sermon by Bishop Michael Hawkins

commands, “Ephatha, Be opened.” The man is restored, whole again, both hearing and speaking. And the Gospel ends fittingly with both the proclamation and praise of Jesus, which even our Lord’s pleading cannot quell.

That is the Gospel, that in Christ, we may truly be opened up to this communion with God and with one another. But I want you to think a little bit harder about those sweet and dear words. For how does Jesus heal this man? How can such simple words and touch achieve this? All of Christ’s miracles point us to his passion, to his saving death for us. There, Christ took on himself our sins, all our brokenness, and he suffered the aloneness of humanity, separated from God and neighbour, forsaken by all. He bore our griefs and sorrows and infirmities. So Jesus heals this man and us, by taking on himself the isolation and silence of sinful humanity. Psalm 38 speaks of Jesus’ suffering in soul and body: “As for me, I was like a

Trinity XII Sermon by Bishop Michael Hawkins

deaf man, and heard not; and as one that is dumb, who doth not open his mouth.”

Jesus takes on himself our infirmities, the infirmities of the deaf and dumb man. He became deaf and dumb, that we might hear and speak. He was bound that we might go free, condemned that we might be forgiven. He died, that we might live. So we read in Isaiah, “He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.”

It is by Jesus’ cross and passion, by his death, that we are reconciled to God, and in him, to one another. In Christ crucified, communication is restored. We have our communion in him, with him, and through him. It should be no wonder, for he is the Word made flesh, God’s own perfect and complete self-expression come in

Trinity XII Sermon by Bishop Michael Hawkins

our humanity. In the mystery of our salvation, the Word himself becomes deaf and silent. The Life of the world dies, all for us.

The Word speaks this word to you today: “Ephatha. Be opened!” That word is for you. Jesus Christ would take you aside, and he would be absolutely clear with you about your need, even pointing out to you your obvious need. And then he would point you to God, to his gracious will for your healing and restoration. And he would speak that same word to you, here, today. The word is to you and for you. Let him open you up. And then we may join them and say, “Praise be to thee, O Christ.” In the name of Jesus Christ then, Ephatha, that is, Be opened.+ Amen.