

Enthusiastic Believers Praise the Lord

Our text for today's sermon is the Gospel Lesson - Mark 7:31-37 - note especially verses 36 & 37, the reaction of the crowds to Jesus' miracle:

³⁶ Jesus commanded them not to tell anyone. But the more he did so, the more they kept talking about it. ³⁷ People were overwhelmed with amazement. "He has done everything well," they said.

Dear Friends in Christ,

The following story is true. It happened in one of our large Wisconsin Synod congregations back in the Midwest not too many years ago.

One of the members worked up the courage to invite the new family on his block to his church one Sunday morning. He didn't know this family's religious background but he wanted to share his faith, he wanted to share his church with them and, to his pleasant surprise, they agreed to accompany him.

So they went to church together and sat together in the same pew. The member helped his guests find the hymns to sing, helped them work through the liturgy, and then came the sermon. To the member's delight, the old WELS pastor had a real good sermon that day...a real "barnburner." It was so good, in fact, that as the pastor made a particularly good point the guest said (right out loud) "Amen! This caused the member to blush a bit. He looked around nervously and then sank down in his seat, embarrassed.

Soon his guest interrupted a second time. He said, "Hallelujah! Praise the Lord!" The member thought to himself, "The pastor's not even half way through his sermon...I'm going to have to do something." Before too long the guest shouted out, "Praise the Lord!" The member leaned over and whispered to his guest, "I'm sorry Jim, but in this church we don't 'praise the Lord.'

In this church we don't praise the Lord. Do you think that outsiders have ever said that about us?...about our enthusiasm, or lack of it, in regard to our faith? I want you to understand today that you can be an enthusiastic believer, an excited Christian, without being overly emotional.

Enthusiastic Believers Praise the Lord

- 1. They Understand Christ's Mission**
- 2. They Appreciate Christ's Redemption**

Today's text gives us a picture of some people who were excited...they were "overwhelmed with amazement." It was impossible for them to be anything else after what they'd witnessed - a genuine miracle. Large crowds came to Jesus wherever he went, a pathetic procession of people, some on crutches, some on stretchers, people with sightless eyes, people with speechless tongues, people with twisted limbs. The inspired writer Mark picks out only one example, a man who was deaf and could hardly talk because of a speech impediment.

Jesus touched the man's ears, he touched the man's tongue, and then he looked heavenward. This was to show the man and all those who watching that it was God himself who was providing the cure. Jesus spoke the mighty word '*ephphatha*' (Be Opened) and immediately the man's ears were opened. He could hear perfectly. Immediately the man's tongue was freed of impediment. He could speak plainly.

This miracle excited all those who were present. We read that the people were "overwhelmed with amazement." They had never seen anything like this before. A man from their neighborhood, someone they had known for years, the guy who couldn't speak or hear was now speaking plainly and hearing everything that was said. And a lot was being said. "Wow, what a miracle!" "This Jesus can heal people!" "I saw it with my own eyes, but it's still hard to believe!" "He is amazing!" "He does everything well!" "What power he must possess!" "He makes the deaf hear and the mute speak, he can do anything!" Jesus commanded them not to tell anyone, but the more he commanded them, the more they kept talking about it. They were thrilled witnesses to what they'd seen and heard...excited...enthusiastic.

There are a lot of things that get people excited nowadays, the national healthcare debate, the swine flu, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, trillion dollar deficits, the neighbors' barking dog, restrictive homeowners' associations...I could go on and on. Why is it that we aren't very often as enthusiastic about our faith, as enthusiastic about Christ, as we are about these other issues? Why is it that we don't often give the impression that our faith is a passionate concern? In the face of the wonderful, life-saving, life-changing things Jesus has done for us, we're downright casual.

Now, I'm not talking about emotional outbursts or overenthusiastic displays of behavior at a worship service. People who are given over to this kind of highly emotional worship often do so because of a misunderstanding about the work of the Holy Spirit. They think incorrectly, "the more excited I am, the more enthusiastic I feel, the greater my display of emotion...the stronger my faith." But the Christian faith is not subjective. It is not an emotion. The Christian faith is objective. It looks outward at Jesus and what he's done and not inward at how I feel.

No, what I'm talking about is the kind of enthusiasm that makes your religion a clear part, an evident part of your daily life...clear and evident to everybody. You see, God has made you a new and different person in Christ. He has done great things for

you, things that ought to fill you with gratitude and enthusiasm for him, anxious to serve him, eager to tell others about him.

If you don't show enthusiasm for Christ, excitement over what he's done for you, it's understandable when the unchurched you meet remain indifferent about religion. I want you to think for a moment about the commercials you see on TV...someone driving a car on a twisting road or people quenching their thirst with an ice cold drink. The most basic principle of television advertising is to show people using a product, to show people enjoying a product, in order to encourage you to try the product too. To borrow a page from the TV ad people, when you show those around you how important your Christian faith is, how it give purpose and meaning to your life, comfort in time of loss, hope and certainty to your future, how it answers the major questions in life, how it guides you in this life, how it prepares you for the life to come, how it excites you, this can attract people to find out how they, too, can get some of the same, the same comfort, the same hope, the same answers, the same assurances, the same excitement.

The people who witnessed Jesus's healing miracle were indeed excited and overwhelmed with amazement. But for most of them that day, this turned out to be a superficial excitement because it wasn't rooted in faith. After the initial amazement passed, they went back to their old ways, rejecting this Jesus as Messiah, trusting in themselves. They never really understood who Jesus was and why he came. They never understood their deep need for him. They never understood his mission.

Jesus had not come merely to amaze the people of his day with miracles. The miracles were an important part of Jesus's ministry but they were done to strengthen the faith of the disciples, they were done to prove that Jesus was divine, they were done in fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy such as the prophecy of Isaiah which was our first lesson today. The miracles were not Jesus's mission, but they were done in support of his mission.

His mission was to seek and to save the lost...all of us. He'd come to restore the bridge between God and mankind that had been washed away in the flood of sin. His mission was to fulfill all righteousness by living a sinless life as your substitute and mine. His mission was to pay for the sins of the world by dying on the cross of Calvary as your substitute and mine. Jesus knew that many of those who witnessed his miracles misunderstood his mission. They thought a great magician was among them...but not the Messiah. That's why Jesus said, "Tell no one." He says the same thing to you and me. Tell no one. If all you can say is that our congregation is friendly, our windows are beautiful, we have a lot of activities, we have padded pews and air conditioning, tell no one.

But Jesus also says, "Tell everyone!" Tell everyone if you have seen your sin-stained life and found a forgiving Savior. Tell everyone if you have run up against impossible problems and found the solution in prayer. Tell everyone if you have faced

death in the family and have been comforted with the hope of eternal life. Tell everyone if you have fallen prey to a weakness of the flesh and have found strength through the Holy Spirit to fight it...Tell everyone.

Here's the point. When you truly realize your great need for Jesus, when you truly realize what great things he has done for you with his life and his death, you just can't be casual about him. If your life has been spared by the skill of a surgeon, you're going to be grateful to that doctor. Not only will you gladly pay for his services, you're going to tell others about that surgeon's skill and recommend that surgeon to them.

You and I have been spared from the fires of hell by the skillful, loving work of our Savior. He doesn't hand you a bill, he simply says, "Follow me." You have a chance to show your gratitude to him, your enthusiasm for him in your life. And when you enthusiastically live your love for Christ, those around you will see it, will hear it, and will learn from you.

We're here today to worship the God who made us, the God who saves us. We haven't come just to admire him, just to be amazed by him. We have come to worship the Lord, yes, to praise the Lord. We DO praise the Lord in this church, because he is our Lord and we are his people, because he is our Redeemer and we are his redeemed. Your dedication to him, your enthusiasm for him, your life of gratitude, your life of love is really the best way to praise the Lord. And it just might arouse others from their slumber of indifference and make them enthusiastic believers too.

Let us pray:

Gracious Lord,

When we stop to think of all that your love has done for us we are overwhelmed with amazement and gratitude and love. Help us to respond with lives that show our appreciation for you, lives that witness our confidence and contentment to those around us who do not yet know you. Use us and our lives of joy to bring your message of love and forgiveness to others. Amen.