

In Touch with God Twenty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time/B September 6, 2015
9:00 AM Is 35:4-7a; Jas 2:1-5; Mk 7:31-37 (We have to look forward joyfully to what God is doing, but then we have to cooperate with it.)

One thing that never changes is the **basic human need to look forward to something**. It's easier to supply for children than for adults. I went away to a boarding school and as soon as we resumed classes in the fall, the first thing we looked forward to was Columbus Day because it was a day off and we had an all day picnic and fair. As soon as that was over we looked forward to Halloween because then we got donuts and apple cider and a movie. That was the first movie of the year. We didn't have access to the outside world. So then we looked forward to Thanksgiving, although we couldn't go home. And then we looked forward to Christmas when we actually could go home. And **that's how our year went, always looking forward to the next moment, you might say, of relief from the routine.**

Well, Isaiah is thinking about that too, but for adults. The word of God comes through **Isaiah** to tell people that **we all have to look forward**, not to some mere holiday or some vacation, but **to the work of God that is breaking into our world and actually attempting to re-create it**. He mentions a world without strife, injustice, illness. This is a hope that the people of our biblical tradition have kept for centuries, centuries before Christ. He, **Jesus, called it the kingdom of God**. He acknowledged that we really need to welcome this kingdom of God, but at the same time it does have certain obligations that play upon us. **It entails certain responses that we have to make**. So it's a double thing: **we have to look forward joyfully to what God is doing, but then we have to cooperate with it.**

Now this is the rub because we see, and Jesus himself saw, that people don't like to change. He said, "When people drink old wine, they don't want new wine. Well, that's true. But he was talking about us and how **we don't really want to be different**. We don't want new things in our lives. We may like to buy new things, but we don't want to change. We don't want our own garment thrown out and replaced, "garment" being a term referring to habits. *Habitus* is garment. So this is the situation. **God is trying to do something new. Are we going to cooperate?** That remains to be seen. That's the issue the Scripture is presenting us with.

Now in the gospel story we see **Jesus actually carrying out the very agenda of God in bringing healing to this deaf mute**. There are some aspects of this that are very surprising, which I will mention because they would be **surprising to the original audience**, but to us probably not. The first is **Jesus goes to gentile territory**, the Decapolis. Well, this is not what the Jews would expect. They were the chosen people. And Jesus is saying, well, not just you. **When it comes to the mercy of God, there are no borders**, there are no boundaries.

Surprise number two is when he got there, **he found faith**. He found a welcome more so than in his hometown, more so than among his own people—surprise number two. Not only is God's mercy without boundaries, but **it's surprising who was really ready to welcome it, to respond to it.**

Then the third point that is made by Mark is that Jesus takes this hapless man, this deaf mute, **away from the crowd**. And that is very significant because very often I have found that people who are suffering, people who perhaps don't have a good image of themselves, people who perhaps are dealing with rejection or failure, very often they are **suffering something precisely because of the people around them**. What they need is to get away. What they need is to start over from a different point of view. They've been told what's wrong with them all along by all the people around them. Now they have to hear something else, a new message. **They have to be put in touch with God**. That's what Jesus' role was, to put people in touch with God. So surprise three, all of a sudden this man can hear and, not only that, but he can speak. **Something within him has been released and now life is flowing through him**.

Jesus can do the same thing for us because we are sometimes very deaf. God is always trying to speak to us. Do we hear him? No, very often we are too busy or there is just too much noise around. **Jesus will put us in touch with God**. We will hear his voice, not like you hear my voice, but **you will hear the word within you; and that will bring you life and that will bring you guidance**. And not only that, but it will give you something to say. We often encourage people to share their faith, but then they say, well, I don't really know. Well, they don't really know because they have never quite been touched. This is what we need. We need what the deaf mute received: a touch that we can experience God. And then **we will be motivated to change whatever it is we need to change**. We will be motivated to be hopeful of the future and welcoming of even what appears to be social chaos. Yes, there will be social chaos. God never promised us that our lives would be tranquil here and now. **But through all the chaos, God is doing something; and we can be his coworkers; we can be his partners**.