

Sexagesima , A ✕ D 2010

Luke 8:4-15

In the Name of the Father and of the ✕ Son and of the Holy Spirit.

1 Why do you have ears? Why are they intricately designed, with tympanic membranes, stirrups, anvils, and hammers, cochlea, and Eustachian tubes? Why do sound waves vibrate air particles to transmit sound over long distances? Why that pair of funny shaped pieces of flesh that adorn the sides of your head? He who has ears to hear, let him hear. Faith comes by hearing, and hearing through the Word of Christ. You have ears, first and foremost, to hear the Word of God.

2 There's a way of thinking about Sunday morning worship that discounts the fact that God has given you ears for a reason. This way of thinking believes that the most valuable roles to fill on a Sunday morning are those that get to sit in the chancel, read from the lectern, distribute at the altar, sing at the microphone, conduct the service, lead the worshippers, or whatever. Nonsense. Those odd-shaped contraptions on the side of your head testify that there is a more important role that God wants to be filled every Sunday morning: that of hearer. He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

3 The notion that if you're not in the chancel, not at the front, you're not participating in worship is dead wrong. God sends you pastors for the same reason He has given you ears: that you might hear the Word of God. He who has ears to hear, let him hear. Preachers are not the end, not the goal; they are only a means to make you hearers of the Word. The Augsburg Confession declares, "so that we may obtain this faith, the ministry of teaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments was instituted. Through the Word and Sacraments, as through instruments, the Holy Spirit is given. He works faith, when and where it pleases God, in those who hear the good news that God justifies those who believe that they are received into grace for Christ's sake" (AC V). The Church is a mouth house, a preaching station, a place created so that your ears might be filled with the Word, through which the Holy Spirit works to create faith. So we cover our pastors in liturgical camouflage, making them indistinguishable from altar, lectern, and pulpit, covering everything except their mouths and hands, as if to say, "We don't care about you, what you wear, how you look; just give us the gifts from our Lord."

4 Pastors exist so that you can be a hearer of the Word of God. To be a hearer of the Word is a desirable, valuable vocation, and one that God desires all people to have. In a moment, you'll reaffirm God's call to me to be your preacher in song, exhorting me to "Preach you the Word and plant it home To men who like or like it not, the Word that shall endure and stand When flow'rs and men shall be forgot." "Preach you the Word and plant it home And never faint; the Harvest Lord Who gave the sower seed to sow Will watch and tend His planted Word." We don't care, preacher, whether you want to or not. We know the cost is high, but the consequence of withholding the Word is even greater. We have ears; let us hear the Word.

5 "The sower sows; his reckless love Scatters abroad the goodly seed, Intent alone that all may have The wholesome loaves that all men need. Though some be snatched and some be scorched And some be choked or matted flat, the sower sows, his heart cries out, 'Oh what of that, and what of that?' Of all his scattered plenteousness One-fourth waves ripe on hill and

flat, And bears a harvest hundredfold: 'Ah, what of that, Lord, what of that!'" He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

6 The Seed is the Word of God, and the Word is the Seed of the woman, the flesh of the Virgin. The Word became flesh. The Word does not return empty but accomplishes the purpose for which He is sent. He takes the sins of the world, pulls the weeds and thorns and lets them be woven into the crown that will pierce his head. He works and waters the soil with His own sweat and blood, pouring from his pierced body. The infertile ground receives His crucified and lifeless body. And like a kernel of wheat that falls to the ground and dies and in the spring produces a healthy plant, He sprouted alive from the tomb. Because of the death and resurrection of Jesus, the dead soil of humanity has a new hope. You who had only hope to return to dirt have hope beyond the grave.

7 This is incomprehensible yet delightful. Even though your ears are not naturally receptive to the Word of God, even though your heart is not by nature fertile soil, the Seed of the Word has been scattered. What a miracle: you are here. God has gathered you, even you, called you out from a nation of people deaf to the Word of God, a people of hard hearts, brought you from death to life. In the waters of Baptism, your lifeless ears have been revitalized, resurrected. You who were not a hearer have been made a hearer of the life-giving Word of God. This Word is for you. It creates, it vivifies, it does what it says, gives life. In the waters of Baptism, the deaf are made to hear; rebels against the Word of God are transformed into hearers of the Word. Those who have no life become those who live in the Word of God.

8 So that you might have this faith, God sends preachers. So that you might have life, He created an office, the preaching office. So that you might hear the Words of Christ, the words of eternal life, the Word of Absolution, God dispatches His Absolution men, pastors charged with speaking words of forgiveness to those repentant. The only ones coerced to go to Confession are those who are coerced to give out the gift of God's forgiveness. Christians go freely to receive this gift, to let their ears be filled with the Word of Absolution, to drown out the cacophony of voices that try to condemn you, to make you guilty and ashamed. Pastors go to absolve because God conscripts them so that you might be hearers of this holy, healing, comforting Word of forgiveness.

9 He who has ears to hear, let him hear. Those odd-shaped organs that frame your head turn out to be quite beautiful, as they are the organs into which God pours His precious, life-giving Word. But the Word, it turns out, is not exclusively for your ears. Eat the Word. Receive the Incarnate Word, Jesus, as He creates the real presence of His own Body and Blood in His Supper, as He gives you these to feed you with forgiveness. Here, hearers of the Word are made eaters of the Word, drinkers of the Word, people of the Word, filled and fed with the Word which gives life. Hear and Eat. This is why you have ears, and preachers, and lips and tongues: to receive the Word. He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

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Pastor Jeff Hemmer