

Twenty-third Sunday – September 6, 2015

My hearing isn't what it used to be, so I am touched by Jesus' healing of the deaf man with a speech impediment in today's gospel. I was also reminded of a cute story about an almost stone deaf Grandpa. He finally went to the doctor to see if anything could be done about his condition. The doctor fitted him with a set of almost invisible hearing aids that allowed him to hear like new.

When Grandpa went back for his monthly checkup, the doctor said: "Your hearing is quite good. Your family must be really pleased that you can hear again." "Oh," Grandpa replied, "I haven't told my family yet. I just sit around and listen to their conversations. I've already changed my will three times!"

I think steady, gentle strength is a key quality of Jesus in today's gospel. He took the deaf man aside by himself. He used loving touch to bring about the man's cure. In another gospel (Matthew 12:20), the prophet Isaiah is quoted as describing Jesus as one who would not "quench a smoldering wick" or "break a bruised reed." If a wick was almost extinguished, he would not put it out. If a reed was so bruised it was almost broken, he would not snap it apart. There was nothing in Jesus that contributed to death. He was life and he refused to contribute to the ways of death. The steady, gentle strength of Jesus comes from his sure knowledge of being loved by God and of being the bearer of the Holy Spirit into a suffering world.

But what intrigues me most is his endless quest to give this steady, gentle strength to others, to people like you and me.

I understand there is a theory about steady, gentle strength in family therapy literature. In seriously dysfunctional families there is often one person who is healthier than the others. If that person can hold on to his or her own health, the sparks in the other family members can slowly be revived. But if the healthy person gets sucked into the sickness, the family unit will descend more deeply into its destructiveness. This is a great testament to the power of one. It's steady, gentle strength that refuses to participate in sickness.

Jesus, the healthy one, holds onto steady, gentle strength in a fractured world. He will not allow us to suck him into our sickness. Rather, he brings us into himself. He sticks his fingers in our ears so we cannot hear the outside but are guided to the inside center of our heart. Then he places his spirit into us. He unites our center with his center which is open to God. United with this Divine Open One and his steady, gentle strength, our hearts open. We can now hear and speak the Word of God.

No wonder people can say of Jesus: "He has done all things well." May it be said of us as well as we open up our lives to Jesus' steady, gentle strength.