

One of the great “promises” of the internet is that it would “**open up the world**” to its users. Well, in a sense, the internet instead of providing an opportunity for us to open ourselves up to the world around us, it has provided an incredibly simple way of **retreating into our own small world**, the world of our own way of living, thinking, spending, voting and even praying.

Open the world up?

Maybe .... for a few. But for many of us, the technology has enabled us to simply **close ourselves off from so much**...enabled us to close ourselves off from anything or anyone who challenges us or makes us uncomfortable, or in some cases, even frightens us.

Of course, other ideas are not the **only things** we close ourselves off to. Some of us close ourselves off to **new opportunities and new experience**. And some of us even close ourselves off in a **physical sense**, retreating night after night to the safety and security of our homes with every window and door securely closed and bolted.

Do we do the same with God?

**“He put his finger into the man’s ears and spitting, touched his tongue.....and said to him, ‘Ephphata!’ ...that is, ‘Be opened!’”**

In one sense, our Gospel story is one more example of Jesus “performing” a miracle to help someone in need. That shows the depth of Jesus’ **compassion**. But in another sense, it is more than that, particularly in the details provided by Mark, (7:34) the touching of the man’s ears and tongue, and that strange word Ephphata! (Be opened!)

You might think that this Gospel passage is the only time you have ever heard this word before. But it is used at every infant baptism, as the priest or deacon touches the baby’s ears and mouth asking God to open his or her ears to **hear God’s word**, and open his or her mouth to **proclaim it**. You see, as with nearly everything we read in Scripture, the stories about the Lord Jesus are not simply a remembrance of something he said or did long ago. They are evidence and signs of God’s **continued action in this time and place**. And so, when God says, “Ephphata!” to the man who is deaf and mute, he is saying that same to **you and me**.

I guess that should not surprise us. After all, Jesus did a lot of “opening up” as he ministered to others. He opened the hearts of people that they might show **compassion and mercy and forgiveness**. And of course, the most important “opening of all, the empty tomb with the **stone rolled away**. Not even the door of death could remain closed in face of Jesus’ love and faithfulness. One thing for sure, however you choose to define faith, it is not about being **closed off** and turned inward. It is about **being open**, turned outward toward God and others, ready to receive every good thing he wants for each of us.

Ephphata! Be opened!

What do we need to be **open to**? New ways of seeing the world and every person in it? New ways of thinking? **Giving** more? Loving more? **Being** more?

I guess it all comes down to whether or not we **feel the need to change**. If not, then “Ephphata!” is simply an empty word. But if so, if we truly desire to allow God to change us, then strange word “Ephphata!” means so much more, it means the difference between a life we choose **for ourselves** and a life chosen for us **by God**. Which will it be?