

I have a secret I want to share with you. I now wear hearing aids and have the last five months. Like many men of my generation, I resisted the need for years.

Just turning the volume switch up on the TV, the wireless and my phone seemed to work, except with people. I never really enjoyed having others shout at me when they realised, I couldn't hear them. It has certainly made for a much better beginning to my marriage. Jennifer was not at all pleased when I kept asking her to face me when talking to me. Our trip across the Nullarbor also was made much more agreeable, except when the battery ran out on the left side aid when I was driving or the right one when she was driving.

I also had a rather disastrous start to my new life with them when I lost one within the first two weeks. Behind the ear aids are great except when you need to take off a jumper or a top. Once while shopping for clothes I clearly left an aid behind in a changing booth, never to be seen again despite long searches. Now that I am back in Melbourne, I have discovered another issue. Masks and aids are very problematic, in that they easily get locked together.

Hearing, like all our senses, are aspects of our humanity that we so easily take for granted until they start to fail. So it is in today's gospel when the unnamed man is brought to Jesus by his friends. Yes, it almost escapes our ears as well as our eyes the man does not make into Jesus' presence on his own.

*"They brought to him a deaf man" V 32*

To get a better understanding of what's happening in the encounter, I would like to look closely at the three main characters in our gospel story, the friends, the deaf man and of course Jesus. We will look at them closely, to feel their emotion to try to understand their feelings as God's healing comes unexpectedly into their lives.

First the friends. One thing we can say about these friends at the very beginning is they loved this deaf and mute man. They loved him enough to make a special effort to bring him to Jesus. They loved him enough to forget about their own welfare for a moment, so that this man could experience the grace of God. And they were looking out for the interest of their friend. They brought him to Jesus.

They had a dream for their friend. A dream which said if they could just bring him to Jesus, then Jesus might or could heal him. They had a dream of something better for their friend, a dream where his life could enjoy the sounds of God's creation, where he could speak to others in conversation, a dream where this man would no longer have to talk by signs, but he would understand everything and be understood. As Don Quixote says in the play *The Man of La Mancha*, about madness, "Maddest of all," he says, "is to see life as it is and not as it should be." These friends had a vision, a dream for their friend of a different life, not life as it was, but life as it could be as God's grace through Christ was brought to this man couldn't hear or speak.

And they did. But what drove them to Jesus? How did they know Jesus could heal their friend? They had faith in Jesus. They must have heard Jesus before and in their hearing, they believed that this man Jesus could heal their friend. They had faith, they had trust in Jesus.

The faith of these friends was passed on to this man which allowed him to stand before Jesus with the sure confidence that Jesus would and could heal him.

As we look carefully at these friends, what did we learn from them for our own faith lives? I think the major point for us, we, the church, the body of Christ, are like those friends in the world today. We are the body of Christ; the church are the friends for all those people in today's world. Friends who have come to know Christ, who have faith in Christ, who are willing to share that faith.

Now for the deaf man. Can you imagine what went through his mind? First, he had to believe and trust in what his friends were telling him. He had to go along with them as they took him to hear Jesus. The faith had been passed on. He, I imagined, believed too that Jesus could heal him or he wouldn't have come. Then Jesus beckons him to come to one side, to be alone with him. Standing there in front of Jesus the man could feel Jesus touch his ears, place the spittle on his tongue, then looking at Jesus, he could see him look toward heaven, then say this funny word EPHPHATHA, then all sorts of sounds were invading his ears, voices, birds. Can you imagine hearing for the first time?

Then knowing that he could speak. What did he say? He looked at the Jesus. I wonder what was the word that he wanted to express his, gratitude and the overwhelming feelings inside him? What could he say? I can imagine all he could do was beam as the tears streamed down his face. Then he saw one of his friends running toward him and the next thing he knew his friend was hugging him and saying to him, "This is Jesus".

From his friends he received the faith to trust in the power of Jesus to heal him. His faith was strong as he stood in front of Jesus and allowed him to extend God's grace into his life through the word and touch.

Because of Jesus, his life was forever changed. He experienced God's grace in a powerful way in his life. As we experience the brokenness of this world, as we are led by others to see Jesus, we can learn to fully trust Him with our lives as we surrender them to Jesus. Whatever the brokenness is Jesus meets our needs. He meets us at our point of need, be it frustration, fear, futility, fatigue, failure, sin, guilt, sorrow, broken relationships, whatever is our burden, Jesus meets us with his grace.

Now we turn to the final character in our story, Jesus himself. He knew the plight, the suffering of this man and he wanted to help. But at the same time, he knew what his mission was all about, to bring salvation to all people. So that is why he asked the people, the friends of this man and the man himself, not to tell everyone what had happened. He wanted to show the people as he neared the end of his journey to Jerusalem, that miracles, free bread, were just a part of his ministry, his mission was also to bring salvation by the way of the cross. Jesus knows our healing is important, but our salvation is essential. Jesus understood the need of this man as he understands our needs, but he also realized the importance of understanding the salvation he brought by the way of the cross. It is not either or, but both/and as we look at Jesus healing and salvation.

Jesus shows us very clearly that he wants to be part of our brokenness to bring a measure of his grace into it, but at the same time, he wants us to accept and believe that only through him can we obtain the salvation God has, planned for all his children.