



# SERMON OF THE WEEK

First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau

August 12, 2018

“Walking, Hearing, and Speaking Plainly” - Hope Restored Series  
Christopher Pan

**G**ood morning! I'm Chris Pan and I'm on staff at the church as Executive Director.

We're continuing today in our sermon series called, “Hope Restored.” We are going in order through the entire Gospel of Mark, verse by verse. We are walking with Jesus, and seeing how He restores hope to a world in need. We have reached the end of Chapter 7, where Jesus heals a man who is deaf and mute.

Our sermon title today is, “Walking, Hearing, and Speaking Plainly.” We'll be exploring Walking. And Hearing. And... Speaking Plainly.

As we go through the text and the sermon, ask yourself these two questions: “What is God saying to me?” And, “What does He want me to do about it?”

Before we read the text together, let's pray. Jesus, may we walk with You today. You are the Savior and Redeemer of the world. Open our ears. May we hear You now. We invite Your Holy Spirit to guide us and transform us now. In Your powerful name we pray, and all God's people say, AMEN!

Please stand if you are able, as we read together the gospel of Mark, Chapter 7, verses 31 to 37.

*31 Then Jesus returned from the region of Tyre, and went by way of Sidon towards the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis. 32 They brought to Him a deaf man who had an impediment in his speech; and they begged Jesus to lay His hand on him. 33 Jesus took him aside in private, away from the crowd, and put His fingers into his ears, and He spat and touched his tongue. 34 Then looking up to heaven, Jesus sighed and said to him, “Ephphatha,” that is, “Be opened.”*

*35 And immediately the man's ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. 36 Then Jesus ordered them to tell no one; but the more He ordered them, the more zealously they proclaimed it. 37 They were astounded beyond measure, saying, “He has done everything well; he even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak.”*

This is the Word of the Lord!  
Thanks be to God!

We'll look at our passage today in three parts: Walking, Hearing and Speaking Plainly.

## Part 1: Walking.

Jesus is in Tyre. Last week we heard about His interaction with the Syrophoenician woman, the

“dog and crumbs” passage. which I'm very glad that Pastor Tim preached about...and not me.

Jesus is in Tyre and is headed back to the Sea of Galilee. Here's a map of Tyre and the Sea of Galilee, with the direct, most efficient route between the two marked in purple. Jesus and His disciples don't take that route.



*Mark 7:31 Then Jesus returned from the region of Tyre, and went by way of Sidon towards the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis.*

Jesus goes from Tyre to Sidon, which is 22 miles north, then to the Decapolis, which is to the southeast. That trip is marked in red on the map. It's like going from the Honolulu airport to Waikiki by first going north to the North Shore, and then all the way around the island, Laie, Kaaawa, Kailua, Hawaii Kai, etc.

This trip that Jesus and His disciples take, on foot, walking, would take eight months. Eight months!

Jesus' entire public ministry lasted about three years. We just covered eight months of it in this one verse! Almost a quarter of His public ministry takes place during this one verse!

Jesus spends eight months on foot, walking everyday with His disciples. They walk through notoriously Gentile areas, expanding the reach of the Kingdom of God beyond the Jewish borders.

I live less than a mile from a burrito shop. And I love burritos. So this week my family went to get burritos. And usually, we drive, because it's hot and it's uphill and there's no sidewalk on one of the streets. Driving is faster and more comfortable.

But thinking about this passage, this week I said, "Let's walk!" And walking is slower and hotter. But as we walked, we talked, and we noticed the Spanish roof tiles a neighbor was installing and the pile of strange white foam someone else had in their driveway. Dogs barked at us. We found a dime on the ground. It was a lovely walk.

Jesus walks...for eight months. They could have gone the faster way. But Jesus deliberately takes the LONG WAY AROUND with His disciples. He walks with them, He talks with them, invests in them, and lives life with them on this unhurried journey. And nothing glamorous is recorded. In fact, nothing at all is recorded in the Bible about what happens. Just this one verse. Jesus and His disciples just walk together.

And that's the truth about being a follower of Jesus. Being a follower of Jesus means walking with Jesus, for a long period of time, every day, just walking with Jesus. And you might think there's a faster, more efficient way to get where you want

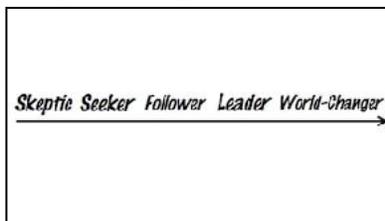
to go, to get to who you want to be, but Jesus takes the long way around with us, too. And nothing glamorous happens, nobody records the details, but we grow closer to Jesus as we walk. Walking with Jesus.

You might think of Sunday morning church service as a destination. That you come and meet God here, at this time and at this place. And that is true, we hope you do meet God here on Sundays.

But this is also true: Jesus is not just here on Sundays. Jesus was walking with you all last week. Those hard times and difficult situations last week, Jesus was right there with you. That fight with your roommate or kids or spouse, Jesus was right there, walking with you. That stressful thing at school or work, He was right there.

And whatever difficult situation that you might anticipate in your week ahead, Jesus is walking with you to meet it. Jesus walks with us every day.

Jesus doesn't say, "I am the *Destination* and the Truth and the Life." He says, "I am the *Way* and the Truth and the Life." (John 14:6) The Way. The way is a path for a journey. Walking with Jesus.



Wherever you are on this journey of faith today, we're glad that you are here, and we invite you to take the next step of the journey. If you're here today as a skeptic, we're glad that you are here. We hope that you take a step from being a skeptic, to being a seeker. If you're here as a seeker,

we hope you take the next step to become a follower of Jesus. Practical step: If this is where you are on your journey, our church is offering the Alpha course in a few weeks. We invite you to attend, or invite someone you know you might be at this stage in their journey.

If you are here as a follower of Jesus, we hope you take the next step to become a leader in the Kingdom of God. And if you are here as a leader, we hope you take the next step to become a world-changer. If you're looking for a practical next step, our church is offering Rooted small groups in a few weeks, and there are always opportunities to serve.

We are all on this journey. Walking with Jesus.

Walking is slow and indirect and hot. But the journey of faith, of becoming and growing as a disciple, has always been an unhurried walk with Jesus. Part One is Walking.

### Part Two: Hearing.

Jesus and His disciples walk for eight months and arrive in the Decapolis, where Jesus heals a man who is deaf and mute. The deaf man doesn't come on his own. He is brought to Jesus by his friends.

*Mark 7:32 They brought to Him a deaf man who had an impediment in his speech; and they begged Jesus to lay His hand on him.*

Just like the friends in Mark Chapter 2 who brought their paralytic friend to Jesus, these friends play a life-changing role in their friend's life—just by bringing their friend to Jesus, and begging Jesus to lay His hand on them.

**T**hat's the nature of friendship. We bring to Jesus our friends, and we beg Jesus to heal them.

His friends bring the man to Jesus. And Jesus heals the man, so he can hear. Can you imagine the joy, the emotion, of being deaf, and then being healed, the miracle of being able to hear for the first time?

I want to show you a video of a 29-year-old woman named Sarah Churman, who was born deaf. At age 29, she had surgery to receive a hearing implant in one ear. This is the video of the implant being turned on, and her hearing, for the first time. It's a 90-second video, and I just want us to soak in the emotion.

[Link to VIDEO: <https://youtu.be/LsOo3jzkhYA>]

That emotion—that joy. Think about how different her life will be going forward. Sarah was writing a blog during this time, and wrote about this experience. She wrote about the rest of that day, once she was able to hear. At one point, she scratched her head and freaked herself out, because she could actually hear herself scratching her head. Try it. It's something I'd never thought about, something you take for granted. For lunch, she had a salad with croutons and she said it was a terrible decision, because all that crunching she said sounded like fireworks going off in her head.

That's what this man in our passage experiences. The newness and joy of being able to hear. And that's what we experience, too. Because we were spiritually deaf, but our friends and family brought us to Jesus, and He has given us the ability to hear.

What does God want us to hear? He wants us to hear how much He loves us.

In Jeremiah 31:3, God says to His people, *"I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you."* That's the NRSV translation. That's a good translation.

But here's the translation from The Message, which I like even better and which I hope you hear today. God says: *"I've never quit loving you and never will. Expect love, love, and more love!"*

God heals our spiritual deafness, so we can hear how much He loves us. God says to you today, *"I've never quit loving you and never will. Expect love, love and more love!"* I hope that sounds like fireworks going off in your head and heart.

Can we talk about Jesus's method of healing now? Because Jesus's healing technique is a bit unique and unconventional.

When I was in college, I had a friend named Paige. Paige had long curly hair, and in the winter, she didn't wear a winter coat. Instead, she wore a red hooded sweatshirt, and a green army jacket over that.

One day, I walked into the computer lab and Paige was sitting there with her back to me. She had her curly hair in pigtails, and she was wearing her very distinctive red hooded sweatshirt and green army jacket.

So I walked up behind her, and she couldn't see me because she was facing forward, and I stuck my fingers in her ears. And the woman who turned around to stare at me was someone I had never seen before in my life. And so I stumbled backwards and stammered, "Not...Paige! So... sorry!" And I ran out of the computer lab.

I tell that story to illustrate this profound theological truth—it is weird to stick your fingers into someone else's ears. Weird when I did it, weird when Jesus did it. It is even weirder to spit on your hand and then touch someone else's tongue. One time, I...I'm just kidding, I don't have a story about that one.

But I love this healing interaction between Jesus and the man, because it is so beautifully unique! God interacts with us in totally unique ways, ways that are perfectly tailored to who we are and where we are and what we need.

We want to reduce everything to a formula—"Ephphatha!" That's the magic word! I just have to say, "Ephphatha," and people will get healed, my bank account will grow, all my problems will go away. But God doesn't interact with us in formulaic ways. He interacts with us according to our unique needs. He walks with us.

Jesus's interaction with the man is so beautiful. First, Jesus takes him aside, privately. Jesus isn't putting on a public show. He's caring gently for this man. It's a personal encounter, this man in the presence of Jesus.

And then, look at the four deliberate actions Jesus takes with this man. The man can't hear, so Jesus doesn't ask him questions, or say what's going to happen. Instead, Jesus ACTS OUT exactly what is going on, what to expect. Jesus acts it out for him.

First, Jesus puts His fingers in the man's ears, to show him, I will heal your deafness. Then, Jesus spits and touches the man's tongue, to show him, I will heal your muteness.

**T**hen, Jesus looks up to heaven—to show the man, this is where My power comes from, the source of your healing. And then Jesus sighs, He breathes out, exhales spiritual power and authority, the breath of God. Then Jesus says, “Be opened.” And the man is healed.

Jesus meets the man just as he is, and it is beautiful and tender and unique. And Jesus meets us just as we are, and it is beautiful and tender and unique.

It’s also still pretty weird. Fingers in ears, spit on the tongue. There are some commentaries on this passage that explain that saliva was thought to have healing properties, and touch was used in medical practices of the day. That’s a helpful explanation, but I don’t actually want to entirely explain the weirdness away.

Because sometimes God’s interaction with us will seem a little weird. We want to understand God and have rational explanations for everything He does. But you know what, it’s called supernatural for a reason, ‘cause it is *super*-natural. Sometimes, we have to come to the limit of our own human understanding and realize that God is beyond our understanding, beyond our natural explanations. God’s going to do things His way. Sometimes it will be a little mysterious. It will be fingers in the ears and spit on the tongue. But we have to let the mystery be, and still obey.

There is a woman in Honolulu named Carolina Jesus. I met her last year when she rented a number of passenger vans and drove 40 homeless men to our church’s Thanksgiving lunch. She returned with some men for our Easter services this year, and some of those men came forward to be

baptized. And Carolina’s story is beyond our natural explanations.

Back in 2002, Carolina was a divorced mom with a teenage son. And she heard God say to her, “Take this homeless person home.” To her own home. Carolina knew it was crazy, but Carolina felt like she was hearing God tell her to do it. And so she knew she had to obey. So she did.

Fast forward to today. Carolina now houses 64 men, who were all formerly homeless or have recently been released from prison. She’s expanded to seven different houses in Kalihi, calling it Shelter of Wisdom. She provides temporary crisis and transitional shelter for the most vulnerable and desperate in our community. She has done this for the last 16 years with no paid staff members. It’s Carolina, her son, all volunteers, including Carolina. Carolina heard God, and obeyed. And God worked in this mysterious, unique, beautiful way.

Jesus heals our spiritual deafness, so we can hear Him. And He tells us that He loves us, and He tell us that He loves the people around us, too. Sometimes He walks us into an area of discomfort. He moves us beyond natural explanations. Fingers in ears, spit on the tongue. Converting your own home into a transitional shelter for homeless men and people exiting prison.

Remember the woman in the video earlier, Sarah Churman? How she got the implant is another story of hearing God, and God working beyond our natural explanations. Sarah was deaf, and one day her husband heard a radio ad for this new type of hearing implant, so they got excited about the possibility. But when they looked it up, they were devastated, because it turns out the implant

cost \$30,000. Per ear! And the implants are not covered by insurance, so there was no way they could afford it. So for days they were despondent. But it turns out Sarah’s mother-in-law is a faithful follower of Jesus. And as the mother-in-law was praying, she felt that God was telling her to give Sarah the money for surgery. And the mother-in-law was not wealthy, she was recently-widowed, but she decided to cash out her retirement savings account and give all the money to Sarah for surgery, because she unequivocally felt like she was hearing from God to do it. That’s how Sarah got the implant in one ear.

Now, lets’ be clear. If you think I’m telling you to give away your retirement savings or invite a homeless person home, I’m not (although the Shelter of Wisdom is always looking for partners). Remember, there is no one size fits all formula—Jesus didn’t stick his fingers into the ears of the leper or the bleeding woman. God speaks and interacts uniquely with us.

So, what is God uniquely saying to you right now? And what does He want you to do about it? Let’s pause now to take a few minutes to pray silently and hear from God. Listen to what Jesus is saying to you. [Pray silently.]

Amen. If you wish you had more time to listen, you are in luck! You have all week to walk with Jesus, and listen.

### **Part Three: Speaking Plainly**

The man who is deaf and mute has his speech restored.

*Mark 7:35 And immediately the man’s ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly.*

I love the description of the healed man “speaking plainly.” Jesus has given him his voice.

Jesus has healed us of our muteness as well. Jesus has given us our voice. What will we speak about?

Like the healed man, we speak about Jesus, we share our story, our experience of being in His presence.

We report what we’ve seen, we say, like the crowd in verse 37, “*Jesus has done everything well; He makes the deaf hear and the mute speak.*”

God has given us a voice to be His co-workers in the world. To be His co-workers, that His Kingdom may come, on earth as it is in heaven.

I’ve been reading a lot about Martin Luther King, Jr. this year, because it’s the 50th anniversary of his death. And there’s something he wrote in his letter from a Birmingham jail that really stood out to me as I was thinking about Jesus healing the man and giving him the ability to speak.

MLK was in Birmingham 55 years ago leading protests against segregation when he was arrested and put in jail. The day he was arrested, an open letter was published in the local paper, stating, “We are convinced that these demonstrations are unwise and untimely.” That letter wasn’t written by segregationists, it was written by eight prominent local clergy members, including the Presbyterian pastor, who in theory supported MLK and civil rights.

So, while he was sitting in the Birmingham jail, MLK wrote an open letter back to those eight clergy members. It is a long and

beautiful letter, worth reading in full. But here’s the part that stood out to me, as I thought about Jesus giving us a voice. Martin Luther King, Jr. writes this:

“We will have to repent in this generation not merely for the hateful words and actions of the bad people but for the appalling silence of the good people. Human progress never rolls in on wheels of inevitability; it comes through the tireless efforts of men [and women] willing to be co-workers with God, and without this hard work, time itself becomes an ally of the forces of social stagnation.”

“The appalling silence of good people.” Jesus walks with us. He restores our hearing. And He gives us a voice. And we are invited to be co-workers with God, and to Speak Plainly.

Proverbs 31:8-9 says this: *Speak out for those who cannot speak, for the rights of all the destitute. Speak out, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy.*

Back to Sarah Churman, one last time. Not only is Sarah’s mother-in-law a faithful follower of Jesus, Sarah and her husband are as well. They spent time as missionaries in China. The night after her surgery, she posted the video because she wanted to share God’s blessing in her life with her friends and family. She just wanted to share her story, about God’s blessing in her life.

When she woke up the next morning, the video had 200,000 views. On the third day, it hit one million views. And TV shows started to call and publicity rolled in. Sarah had two hopes, two talking points she came back to. She used her voice to share her

hope that insurance companies would start to cover the implant and surgery. Because it broke her heart that the technology existed, but people couldn’t get it because they couldn’t afford it.

Sarah used her voice to “speak out for those who cannot speak” and literally to speak for those who cannot hear. She spoke out for the rights of all the destitute, to defend the rights of the poor and needy.”

Sarah’s second hope was that her mother-in-law would get paid back. A week later, Sarah was on the Ellen DeGeneres show. And there wasn’t any change in the health insurance policy for the deaf, but the implant company heard Sarah and gave her a check for \$30,000 to repay her mother-in-law and offered her a free implant for her other ear.

God interacts with us in unique and mysterious ways. He walks with us. He gives us our hearing. He gives us our voice. Walking, Hearing, Speaking Plainly.

Our sermon series is Hope Restored. God is able, and He is intentional about how He restores hope to us and to the world, from the beginning of time, to the end of time.

700 years before the birth of Jesus, 700 years before Jesus meets this deaf and mute man, the prophet Isaiah wrote these words, to restore hope to the nation of Israel, to the people of Jesus’s day, and to us.

Isaiah 35:4-10 says,  
*<sup>4</sup>Say to those who are of a fearful heart,  
“Be strong, do not fear!  
Here is your God.  
He will come and save you.”*

<sup>5</sup> Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,  
and the ears of the deaf unstopped;

<sup>6</sup> then the lame shall leap like a deer,  
and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy.

<sup>8</sup> A highway shall be there,  
and it shall be called the Holy Way;  
It shall be for God's people;

<sup>10</sup> And the ransomed of the LORD shall return,  
and come to Zion with singing;  
everlasting joy shall be upon their heads;  
they shall obtain joy and gladness,  
and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

Amen? Amen!

Let's end in prayer. What is God saying to you? What does He want you do to about it? Let's pray silently and hear from God now.

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Note: Sunday sermon texts are also available at [fpchawaii.org](http://fpchawaii.org) The audio version can be downloaded from iTunes. You may also request the audio version by contacting: [fpchkoolau@gmail.com](mailto:fpchkoolau@gmail.com)