

**Sermon, Proper 18B, 2021
(September 5, 2021)**

Readings at

https://www.lectionarypage.net/YearB_RCL/Pentecost/BProp18_RCL.html

Slides at:

https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1BlOqwUPaLrgL99H5_vvcuSCoJMC7TfjND_BKMIVkh94/edit?usp=sharing

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Ephphatha, Be Opened

In both Christian, Jewish and Muslim Scripture & Tradition, we come to know God as the One who Opens

Christian: (Season of Advent): Key of David: That opens and no one closes...

Jewish Tradition (Hebrew): *Matir Asurim* – "Freer of the Captives"; *Pokeach Ivrim* – "Opener of Blind Eyes"

Sufi Tradition (Arabic): Among the revealed Beautiful Names of God is name Al-Fattah (the Opener)

Today's Readings

First Lesson (Isaiah): Eyes, Ears, Tongues, Waters

Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,
and the ears of the deaf unstopped...
and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy.
For waters shall break forth in the wilderness,
and streams in the desert

Psalms 146: Prisons & Blind Eyes

The Lord sets the prisoners free;
the Lord opens the eyes of the blind; *

Epistle (James): Minds in the Church

Exhorts the church to open full participation in the life of the community to everyone regardless of socioeconomic status.

Today's Gospel:

Part 1: God enables Jesus & His Mission to "be opened" through his encounter with a Syro Phoenician Woman

- Jesus is opened to receive the woman's urgent plea for help and to her persistent challenge despite his initial rejection & rebuke of her

- Jesus is opened to release a narrow understanding of his mission (as being only to the Jews) and receive a broader understanding of his place in God's plan (to open God's kingdom to ALL people)
- A little girl is opened to release the demon that is making her sick and receive restored health and abundance of life.

Part 2: God enables the ears and speech of a man who is deaf and mute to "be opened" through his encounter with Jesus.

Look Beyond Today's Readings to the Full Canon of Scripture:

God opens:

Heavens

City Gates & Temple Gates

Prison doors

Graves & Tombs

Wombs of Women & The Word of God in Holy Scripture

Doors to ministry/work/service/God's Word/sabbath rest/Kingdom of Heaven

The Law to broader interpretation

The Temple to broader participation

Communities & Families to broader sense of membership & belonging

Springs of Water in the Desert

The Seven Scrolls and the Book of Life

Eyes

Ears

Mouths

Hearts & Minds

Again and again, the voice of God says: Be Opened!

Again and again, the voice of the Adversary, the voice of Fear says: Stay Shut!

Last Week's Gospel: Jesus called the crowd and said to them, "Listen to me, all of you, and understand: there is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile, but the things that come out are what defile...."

Jesus calls us to... "Be Open" ...to receive...need not fear what is coming in...

Jesus calls us to...Be Open to receive...AND

"Be Open" ...to release...

but be careful---pay attention to what comes out, and be intentional about where it goes!
Some things need to be released to our neighbors, some things need to be released to God,

and (as Jesus says clearly earlier in Mark chapter 7, some things need to be released into the sewer and back to the earth)

God opens us up to release what is Good & useful & edifying to the world: Good News: praise & thanksgiving; confession & forgiveness

AND

God opens us up to release waste products and toxins and whatever else is not (or is no longer) good & useful & edifying. The question then becomes: how/where/when/with whom can we release our “evil intentions” and other waste products?

Because common sense tells us---we can't just be opened to receive! If we aren't also opened to release, sooner or later we're bound to explode.

(This struggle is very alive for me right now as I am struggling to move through a conflict with a family member. What do I need to “be opened” to receive from this other person? And what do I need to “be opened” to release? I realize that I have a whole lot of accumulated anger, frustration, and resentment that threatens to come pouring out if I “open my lips” ...so I have to figure out how to effectively release my anger without doing harm to my relationships, so that when I “open my lips” my mouth shall pour forth not poison, but praise.)

PSALMS OF LAMENT offer a great pattern for navigating this challenge.

(A word on “Worksheets”)

(SHOW SLIDES/Point out inserts)

Homework #1: Psalm of Lament

Homework #2: Receive & Release Table

I wonder what God's invitation and Jesus' command to “be opened” might mean for you, right now, in your own life?

What might it mean for us to “be opened” with our political adversaries, people who are different from us, people with whom we disagree?

Global or National or Community or even Church Level: Masks, Vaccines, Black Lives, Policing, Afghanistan, Budgets

- Be opened! To receive whom & what? To release what?

Inter-Personal Level: Partner, kids, parents; church, family and friends (especially in times of conflict)

- Be opened! To receive whom & what? To release what?

Internal Level: own doubts & desires; feelings & fears; Voice of God--voice of challenge, the voice of Calling AND the voice of Love coming from within and outside of us

- Be opened! To receive whom & what? To release what?

Ephphatha-Be opened!

Lens to understand Jesus WHOLE life and ministry and death & resurrection

Lens to understand what we're doing in the liturgy

SHOW SLIDES: Liturgy

Receive:

The Word of God (as it comes to us in silence, song, art, scripture readings, homily, reflection, and in the gifts and challenges of the community in which we worship)

Release:

Need, Pain, Fear, Anxiety, Helplessness (Prayers of the People)

Shame, Guilt, Sin, Shortcomings (Confession)

Anger, Resentment, & Forgiveness (Peace)

Gifts of Life & Labor, Money, our Anxiety about Money (Offering)

Thanksgiving (Eucharist)

Receive:

The Body & Blood of Jesus; Unity with God and One Another (In Communion)

Release:

God's Good News and Love in the World (our lives)

To whom, to what, is God calling you to "Be Open" today??

Whom & What is God inviting you to receive??

What is God inviting you to release??

In the silence that follows, I invite you to ponder these questions, and as you do so I invite you to imagine

Jesus taking you aside in private, away from the crowd; gently laying his hands on you; and invoking all the power and mercy of heaven as he speaks to you and prays to God on your behalf: "Ephphatha," "Be opened."

Ephphatha Worksheet #1: Psalm of Lament

Psalm Form: Address God, Complaint, Request, Thanksgiving

Examples:

Psalm 13

1 How long, Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?

2 How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and day after day have sorrow in my heart?

How long will my enemy triumph over me?

- 3 Look on me and answer, Lord my God. Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death,
- 4 and my enemy will say, "I have overcome him," and my foes will rejoice when I fall.
- 5 But I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation.
- 6 I will sing the Lord's praise, for he has been good to me.

Psalm 25:1-2;16-21

- 1 In you, Lord my God, I put my trust.
- 2 I trust in you; do not let me be put to shame, nor let my enemies triumph over me.
- 16 Turn to me and be gracious to me, for I am lonely and afflicted.
- 17 Relieve the troubles of my heart and free me from my anguish.
- 18 Look on my affliction and my distress and take away all my sins.
- 19 See how numerous are my enemies and how fiercely they hate me!
- 20 Guard my life and rescue me; do not let me be put to shame, for I take refuge in you.
- 21 May integrity and uprightness protect me, because my hope, Lord, is in you.

Write your own Psalm of Lament:

Address God:

Express your complaint or lament to God:

Make your request to God:

Offer praise/thanksgiving to God:

Ephphatha Worksheet #2: Be opened... to receive and release *what?*

Ephphatha...Be Opened...

To Receive...	To Release (to God)	In order to receive....	In order to release (to God)
	To Release (to others)		In order to release (to others)