

# Jesus

shepherd • healer • teacher • king • savior • life

## **Welcome**

**Hymn** “Open My Eyes, That I May See” (UMH #454)

**Scripture** Mark 7:32-35 (NLT)

A deaf man with a speech impediment was brought to him, and the people begged Jesus to lay his hands on the man to heal him. Jesus led him away from the crowd so they could be alone. He put his fingers into the man's ears. Then, spitting on his own fingers, he touched the man's tongue. Looking up to heaven, he sighed and said, “Ephphatha,” which means, “Be opened!” Instantly the man could hear perfectly, and his tongue was freed so he could speak plainly!

**Message** “Jesus' Healing Touch”

[June 6, 2021, “Shafts of Light, VI: Helen Keller and Anne Sullivan,”  
Preacher: Reverend Dr. William A. Evertsberg (kuc.org)]

This morning's scripture passage shares the story of Jesus healing the man who was deaf and mute. The man was brought to Jesus, and those who brought him, had the confidence that Jesus would be able to heal him. Out of compassion and care, Jesus took the man aside, and with the touch of his fingers, he restored the man's hearing and speech.

The story of the man's healing made me wonder about healing. This man was so grateful that he and the people around him shared the story of the miracle with everyone – it was too good NOT to share! As I reflected on this amazing story of Jesus' compassion, acceptance, and love for this man, I was reminded of another story.

I would like to share an excerpt from a sermon by the Rev. Dr. William Evertsberg:

*What would it be like to be both blind and deaf? Human beings have five senses, of course, five gateways to the outer world. You could lack two of them—scent and taste—without hampering your participation in the fullness of life. Nobody would even know you lacked them unless you told them.*

*But the other three—sight, hearing, and touch—are integral to the fullness of life. Can you imagine how lonely and isolated you would be if you could neither see nor hear?*

*You [may have heard of] Helen Keller . . . who was born in Tuscumbia, Alabama, in 1880, a perfectly healthy baby, in fact a precocious child. She spoke her first word at six months—“water”. Then at 19 months she almost died from a severe fever which took her sight and hearing. The doctors never knew what afflicted Helen, but the best guess is meningitis. For the next five years, Helen’s isolation turned her into a wild, unruly, angry child with no manners and frequent tantrums. Until the woman she would forever call “My Teacher” walked into her life when she was six years old.*

*If you’re curious about Helen Keller’s life, you could read her moving autobiography, *The Story of My Life*. It’s about a hundred pages and will take you a couple of hours.*

*Or you could spend those two hours watching the film *The Miracle Worker*, which is based entirely on Helen’s own story. Anne Bancroft as Anne Sullivan won the 1962 Academy Award for Best Actress, and Patty Duke as Helen Keller won the Oscar for Best Supporting Actress. The film beautifully and accurately tells the harrowing story of how Anne Sullivan tried to teach Helen Keller the names of various objects in her world by finger-spelling them out for her into Helen’s hand.*

*For days and days it didn’t work. Helen wasn’t making the connection between the finger-spelled words and their corresponding objects, until one day Anne pumped a stream of water over Helen’s left hand and spelled w-a-t-e-r into her right hand, and that was Helen’s eureka moment. Everything had a name. She pounded the ground and demanded to know its name—earth. She touched an oak—tree. By that evening, she’d learned 30 words. A couple of weeks later, she’d learned 900. And she was off to the races.*

*She eventually learned five different methods of communication—she would touch a person’s lips while they talked, literally reading their lips; she read Braille; she learned to speak; she was a mean typist; and most importantly of all, fingerspelling.*

*In 1904 she became the first deaf-blind graduate of Radcliffe College at Harvard University, cum laude, Phi Beta Kappa. For the rest of her life, she traveled the world speaking up—literally, speaking up—for the deaf, and blind, and other differently-abled children. In 1920, she became one of the founders of the ACLU.*

*This is neither here nor there, but do you remember when a few years ago all 50 states minted their own distinctive quarters to feature something special about that particular state? You can probably guess who’s on the Illinois quarter, but do you know who is on the Alabama quarter? It is the only quarter with Braille.*

*Helen Keller and Anne Sullivan are the only partnered pair featured in the Malott Chapel windows. All the rest are extraordinary human beings but solo acts. Without the other, neither Helen Keller nor Anne Sullivan would be included in our group of 15 twentieth-century heroes and saints; we wouldn’t even know their names. They’re a team.*

*That’s important. And that’s all I really want to say this morning: that in order to overcome the [challenges that we face], we really only need two things—our own stubborn resilience, and a friend who **knows** something and just won’t quit.*

*Are you deaf? Are you blind? Are you lame? Are you dyslexic? Are you on the spectrum? Are you ADHD? Do you have cancer? How can you use your hindrance, your differentness, to reach out to some isolated soul stumbling around in darkness and silence or lost in a dark wood alone?*

*It probably really is an obstacle to your participation in the fullness of life, but you could transform that deficit into an asset for someone else, [like Annie Sullivan did].*

*Annie suffered an eye infection when she was a child and was practically blind herself for the rest of her life. She began her life in a horror show of an abusive orphanage.*

*At the age of 14, she convinced state authorities to send her to the Perkins School for the Blind in Boston, but life there at the beginning was only marginally better because at 14 she was practically blind, dressed in rags, illiterate, and had never learned the niceties and courtesies of polite society.*

*Her classmates mercilessly mocked her at first, but she was just as stubborn as Helen Keller and persevered. At the age of 20, she graduated as valedictorian of her class, and in her valedictory address she told her classmates: “Friends, let us set ourselves to find our special calling. Every obstacle we overcome and every success we achieve draws us closer to God and makes life more as God would have it.” Wow, you think Anne Sullivan might have found her special calling?*

*It was precisely her own experience of blindness, loneliness, exile, and exclusion that made her **jump** at the chance to travel from Boston to Tusculumbia to take a little deaf-blind six-year-old by the hand—literally by the hand—and lead her slowly but surely out of her lonely darkness and silence.*

Annie’s experience helped her to be a companion to Helen, and she gave her the tools to live her life fully, to share her story, and to make a difference in the world. God never healed Helen during her lifetime – at least not physically. But God did bring healing through the abilities she had to share with the world. She was able to use the gifts inside her that were opened, just like Jesus did when he opened the man’s ears and loosened his tongue.

Imagine how we are called to be open to all that is around us. Jesus sighed the Aramaic word “*Ephphatha*” which means, “Be Opened.” He spoke these words to a man who was considered unclean because of his illness and because he was a Gentile. But Jesus was, I believe saying to all of us, “Open your minds and hearts! Listen! Care! Welcome others!”

We are asked to hear, to see, to speak in this world, calling for justice, acceptance – all of which bring healing and wholeness in the world. Imagine how we are called to use our gifts to touch other lives as we open our ears to hear, as we open our eyes to see, and as we open our mouths to speak the truth of God’s love in Jesus Christ, our teacher, healer, and redeemer. *Ephphatha!*

## **Prayer**

O Healer of us all, we forget that you can heal our souls and restore us to right relationship with you and others. Forgive us for our neglect, our selfishness in thinking we can do everything ourselves, and for our lack of trust in your love for us. Forgive us for failing to love others as you have loved us. We praise and thank you that you don’t give up on us, and that you forgive our sins even as we forgive those who sin against us. Open our eyes; open our ears; open our hearts to you and to all your children. Amen.

## **Lord’s Prayer**

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not in temptation, but deliver us from evil, for Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

## **Holy Communion**

**Hymn** “He Touched Me” (UMH #367)

## **Sending Forth**



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# WE LIFT UP IN PRAYER

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Juliann  
Joan Allen  
Naomi  
Erin Frane  
Madeline  
Charles Gilman  
Josh Jones  
Jenn  
Gary  
Joyce's Family

Harry Junkins  
Marilyn & Gil  
Donna Smith  
Sophia  
Bobbie Noble  
Dan Strange  
Danny Westbrook  
Marion Collishaw  
Mark & Sarah  
Delores

Arial & the Sillanpaa Family  
Terry Sessions  
Vicky & Emily  
Christine & her parents  
Those in nursing and assisted living care  
Our Church family



# WHO WE ARE

## FUMC PORTSMOUTH A RECONCILING CONGREGATION

We, the congregation of the First United Methodist Church of Portsmouth, New Hampshire, are dedicated in worshipping, learning, and serving with all people as we embrace Jesus Christ's message of love and acceptance. As a United Methodist Church we stand fully behind the statement "Open Hearts, Open Minds, and Open Doors". We celebrate our diversity and invite all persons regardless of age, gender, racial or ethnic background, sexual orientation, marital or socioeconomic status, nationality, physical or mental ability into full membership and participation in the life of this community of faith.



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