

The Third Sunday after the Epiphany, January 26, 2025

Pastor Peter Gregory, Our Savior Lutheran Church, Westminster, Massachusetts

Jesus in Our Ears

Luke 4:16–30

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Eph 1:2

The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to [Jesus]. He unrolled [it] and found the place where it was written, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because he has anointed Me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” And He rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on Him. And He began to say to them, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” (vv 16–21)

It’s going to sound like a strange question, but here goes: Have you considered the ear—the human ear? You might just take a second to steal a glance at your neighbor’s ear, if you feel comfortable doing so. It’s a marvelous thing, isn’t it? Even more marvelous—God gave each of us two of them! Your hearing may not be great. It may be worse than it was when you were younger. But still, the human ear is a wonder of the human body.

Now staring at a human ear doesn’t seem to be a particularly profound or spiritual exercise. But I want to tell you the story of one man, a man named Whittaker Chambers. It was staring at his daughter’s ear changed his world. It marked the beginning of his break from Communism and his movement toward Christianity. In his autobiography *Witness*, he tells the story like this:

I was sitting in our apartment on St. Paul Street in Baltimore. . . My daughter was in her high chair. I was watching her eat. She was the most miraculous thing that had ever happened in my life. . . . My eye came to rest on the delicate convolutions of her ear—those intricate, perfect ears. The thought passed through my mind: “No, those ears were not created by any chance coming together of atoms in nature (the Communist view). They could have been created only by immense design.” (*Witness*, p. 16)

By immense design! We confess that God has created us, body and soul. We believe that He has given us our eyes, ears, and all our members, our reason, our hearing, and all our senses. And He still takes care of them. Today we already witnessed a miracle. Little Vivienne Mae—with her intricate, perfect ears—brought to the waters of Holy Baptism. Made a child of God. Her ears—right there through that Word and water—have been opened by the Holy Spirit. She has been born again to hear—what? To hear the voice of her Shepherd, Jesus Christ, and to follow where He leads. That’s why we have ears—first, to hear Him, and then to hear the voices of those around us.

Ears are interesting. We can shut our eyes. We can close our mouths and hold our tongues. But our ears? That’s another story. They’re always open. We may learn to tune things out. We joke about “selective hearing.” But our open ears are a gateway to our souls. Our ears are a gateway to our souls. What we hear determines what we believe, and what we believe shapes who we are and the course of our lives.

Think about what Jesus heard. Two weeks ago we celebrated the baptism of Christ. At His Baptism, He heard the voice of His Father. The words were these: **“You are My beloved Son; with You I am well pleased”** (Luke 3:22). Being a true man, He needed those words. He needed them when He was tempted in the wilderness. He needed them when the sad, sick, and hungry crowds pressed in on Him. He needed them when the Pharisees and scribes questioned Him, and when He prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, and when Judas betrayed Him with a kiss, and when He stood before Caiaphas and Pontius Pilate, and when they led Him out to crucify Him, and when He suffered in body and soul upon the cross. **“You are My beloved Son; with You I am well pleased.”** At so many moments in His life, His reason and senses could find a million reasons to make Him think that wasn’t true. When He was being crucified, His nerves wanted to tell Him that He wasn’t really the beloved Son, that His Father actually wasn’t well pleased. But He knew what He’d heard. And He knew that it was true. Even in His suffering and death, He could be confident that He was beloved. That His Father was well pleased with Him.

I think about how important that hearing was for our Lord. He heard these words and they shaped and formed His entire life. They enabled Him to do what He did—going to the cross, carrying your sin and mine. Giving Himself for the salvation of the world.

But all that’s still ahead when Jesus enters the synagogue in His hometown of Nazareth and sits down to teach. This, too, is done in obedience to His Father. And it’s done in faithfulness to His call as the promised Savior. When Jesus read the Old Testament, He knew that it laid out His entire life and purpose in the words of Moses and the Psalms and the Prophets. Consider Psalm 40, which says, **“You have given Me an open ear. . . .**

‘Behold, I have come; in the scroll of the book it’s written of Me: I delight to do Your will, O My God; Your law is within My heart’” (vv 6, 7). He came as one who had an open ear and whose heart was ready to delight in the word and law and calling of His Father. Or the prophet Isaiah, who wrote of the Christ: **“Morning by morning He awakens; He awakens My ear to hear as those who are taught. The Lord GOD has opened My ear, and I was not rebellious; I turned not backward. I gave My back to those who strike, and My cheeks to those who pull out the beard; I hid not My face from disgrace and spitting”** (Isaiah 50:4b–6). His ear was open to do the Father’s will. His ears were open to hear the cries and needs of His people. This is why He has come. It’s why He has come in the flesh. Our Lord at His birth with those intricate, perfect ears, and at His crucifixion, with mangled, bloodied ears. But always open to the word and will of His Father.

In the synagogue of Nazareth, we can see His entire ministry and life laid out in what He read from the prophet Isaiah: **“The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor”** (vv 18–19). The Spirit of the Father is on the Son, and this is what He has come to do. What is His primary work? To preach or proclaim: to proclaim good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to the captives, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor. Jesus came in the flesh and comes to us still to do something words. He knew that His words have authority and power to do exactly what He says—to forgive sins, to heal the sick, to raise the dead, to give liberty to those who are captives.

What does it mean by “those who are captives”? Those who are captive through their ears to lies and things that are untrue. Go all the way back to Genesis three with Adam and Eve. It didn’t start with their eyes. It started with their ears. The first thing the serpent did was speak: **“Did God really say . . . ?”** (Gen 3:1) and then **“You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil”** (Gen 3:5). The first seeds of doubt and unbelief were planted in Eve through her ears. And those false believes then changed her heart. And that caused her eyes to look at the world differently—to see the fruit not as something forbidden, but as something for her to take and have. And so she did. It started with her ears.

Now consider your own life. What are you hearing? What are your ears open to? You could take a half hour this afternoon and just make an inventory of your ears. Listening to the TV, how many hours a week? News, podcasts, maybe all of it at the same time. What teachers and voices have I opened my ears to? And are my ears open to the needs

of the people around me? Am I hearing them? Or am I shut off from that? To go further: What conversations are going on inside our heads? What are we telling ourselves? Don't ignore the fact that whatever we hear, whatever we take in our ears, we will begin to believe it. And it will then begin to shape and form our lives. So it's time to take an inventory of our hearing.

Because there's One who wishes to enter our ears, One who wishes to give Himself to us through our ears, and One who desires to be planted in our hearts and so shape our lives. It's our Lord Jesus Christ. He knows the captivity that we have to the things that hear and listen to, and to the things we tell ourselves and the voices circling in our own heads. He has come to set you free. He has come to tell you that this is not the last, the final, or the true word about who you are and what God has in store for you. You aren't captive to the lies or the self-talk. He has come to make you captive to His word. He desires you to live free and at liberty, not just with ears tuned in to all the noises of the world. He comes to open your ears so that you can hear Him and then hear those around you.

That's why Jesus went to the synagogue in Nazareth—teaching God's holy word to His people at a holy time and in a holy service at a holy place (*quote from John Kleinig*). That's why He's come to you this day. To put God's holy word into your ears as His people at this holy time in this holy service at this holy place. What He said to them then is true of us here today as well: **"Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing"** (v 21). In your ears.

Jesus Christ is coming into your ears now with all the gifts He won for you on the cross, with all the things He set out to do in His ministry. He has come to give good news—and He is giving that good news to you. He opens your ears to hear God and your neighbor. The same One who was obedient to the will of His Father, the same One who had an open ear, is the one who carried out His work for us on the cross. Think about what He heard there—the mockery, the lies, "If the Father loved you, He would help you." But He believed the truth, the word that He'd heard: "You are my beloved Son, with you I am well pleased."

For today, this is the truth He would have you hear: Your sins are forgiven. You belong to Him. You are a member of His flock. He says, **"My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. I know My own, and My own know Me"** (John 10:27, 14). Because He's speaking to us again now. It's like our Lord stepped off the pages of Isaiah and into the synagogue in Nazareth, or off the pages of Luke and is standing right here, saying, "I have loved you with an everlasting love." And "My ears were open to the Father to serve you, and my ears are open to your cries and needs today."

Lord, open our ears. You were rejected in Nazareth, let us not reject You. They were embittered against you in Nazareth, thinking of you as too ordinary and homegrown. Don't allow us to be embittered or unbelieving. Open our ears that we might hear, and yield to You, Jesus, and to the grace that You bring, the forgiveness You offer, and the life and salvation You have.

Blessed are those who hear and believe.

The peace that passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Phil 4:7
