

## Sermon Title: "*Ephphatha – Be Opened*"

- **Introduction:** The preacher jokes about staying at the lectern to avoid the flower displays from the memorial service and shares a personal story about being locked out of the clergy vestry, highlighting the relief that comes when a door is opened.
- **Theme of "Being Opened":** The central word from today's Gospel, *Ephphatha* (meaning "be opened"), introduces a broad theme that spans Scripture: the need for things to be opened to function as intended (books, devices, doors, etc.), including our spiritual lives.
- **Biblical Examples of Openness:**
  - **Genesis:** Adam and Eve are banished from paradise, with gates symbolically closed, emphasising the need for salvation to "reopen" paradise.
  - **Peter's Keys:** Jesus promises Peter the keys to the Kingdom, showing that the gates of Heaven are meant to be opened.
  - **Psalms and Prayer:** Passages like Psalm 24 and Jesus' teaching on prayer further emphasise that salvation is about doors being opened—heaven's doors, hearts, and opportunities.
- **The Miracle of Healing:**
  - In Mark's Gospel, Jesus heals a deaf and mute man by commanding, *Ephphatha*—a powerful moment of liberation and transformation. It recalls the prophecy from Isaiah 35, where the coming of the Messiah is associated with physical and spiritual healing.
- **Jesus' Own Openness:**
  - The encounter with the Syrophenician woman reveals Jesus' growth in openness. Initially resistant due to cultural and religious boundaries, Jesus eventually extends his mission beyond Israel. This shows how even Jesus models the need to be open to God's broader plans.
- **Application to Our Lives:**
  - The sermon invites reflection on where we are closed off in our hearts—whether it's refusing to listen to others, ignoring cries for help, or shutting out difficult challenges. Fear often keeps us from being open to others or to God's work.
- **Call to Action:**
  - Jesus' command to "be opened" is not just for the deaf man—it's for all of us, urging trust in God and openness to transformation. This openness leads to communion with both God and neighbour, symbolised by the image of the stone being rolled away from the tomb.
- **Conclusion:**
  - The sermon closes with the word *Ephphatha* again, calling the congregation to live in the light of God's openness, set free by the gospel.

## Questions

1. In Isaiah 35:4-7a, the prophecy speaks of the eyes of the blind being opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. How do we see this prophecy fulfilled in Mark 7:24-end, and what deeper significance does this healing miracle carry for us today?
2. Jesus uses the word "Ephphatha" meaning "be opened." What areas of your life might you feel 'closed off' from God or others, and how can you respond to Christ's call to 'be opened'?
3. The sermon mentions moments of feeling locked out and in need of access. What are some spiritual 'locks' or barriers in your life that may be preventing you from deeper communion with God?
4. The encounter between Jesus and the Syrophenician woman shows a shift in Jesus' openness to others. How might this challenge us to rethink our attitudes toward those we see as 'outsiders' or different from us?
5. Where do you see parallels in your own life to the deaf and mute man, or to the Syrophenician woman, who both had to persist to experience healing and liberation?
6. Reflecting on Jesus' interaction with the Syrophenician woman, where might God be calling you to be more open to unexpected voices or challenges, even when they push you outside your comfort zone?