

Speaking the language of the heart (Mark 7:24-37)

## ***Ephphatha* is Jesus' own original language. Be opened!**

by [LaDonna Sanders Nkosi](#)

September 7, 2018

*To receive these posts by email each Monday, [sign up](#).*

*For more commentary on this week's readings, see the [Reflections on the Lectionary](#) page. For full-text access to all articles, [subscribe](#) to the Century.*

In a world where being closed off to one another seems to be the order of the day, where the agenda is to build walls rather than nurture common connections, Jesus' words in this healing narrative call out loudly to us today: "Ephphatha, be opened!"

Upon first encountering this Mark 7 text I had to find out just how to pronounce *Ephphatha*. You can listen [here](#). This is one of five places where Mark's Gospel retains the Aramaic or original language in which Jesus spoke. (They are Mark 3:17, 5:41, 7:11, 14:36, and 15:34.)

As Jesus goes toward the Sea of Galilee in the Decapolis, the people bring to him a man who is recorded as having a speech impediment and is unable to hear. The people implore Jesus to put his hands on him.

Instead, Jesus puts his fingers in the man's ears, spits, and then touches the man's tongue.

And immediately the man's ears are opened, his tongue is released, and he speaks plainly.

The form of this healing narrative is akin to the raising of Lazarus. In John 11, Jesus looks up to heaven and calls out Lazarus's name in a loud voice, telling him to come out. Here, in Mark 7, he looks up to heaven, and with a sigh and groan, Jesus calls

out, “Ephphatha!” And in case we do not understand the Aramaic, the writer repeats, “Be opened!”

“If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head,” said Nelson Mandela. “If you talk to him in his language, that goes to his heart.”

*Ephphatha* is Jesus’ own original language. Amidst the Greek, the Markan Gospel has retained Jesus’ Aramaic declaration. Still today, all of these years and contexts later, we proclaim this word as we read, preach, and minister this text.

While ministering in Durban, South Africa, with partners at Faith in Action Bible Church, I learned in Bible studies, preaching, and worship that the biblical texts are understood to hold the quality of what they speak about. In other words, scriptures that speak about healing bring the quality of healing to a place or situation when proclaimed or prayed aloud. Scriptures about peace and God’s shalom bring peace and shalom when proclaimed in the community.

Perhaps, with this in mind, we might begin to declare “Ephphatha!” in our nations, our cities, and the closed places in our midst. Ephphatha! Be opened! That our hearts may be open to see one another as God sees.