

# Menifee United Church of Christ

Established in 1962 by God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit

## SERMON FOR

September 6, 2015

*“See, Hear, Speak, And Do”*



## DO

Reverend Bill Freeman: Senior Minister  
Eckart Seeber: Music Minister  
Marie Paulus-Nyquist: Children’s Minister  
Velna Pitts: Lay Reader

### ***Menifee United Church of Christ***

*Sunday Service and Sunday School 10 AM*

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***Live Life Fully Alive!***

September 6, 2015  
“See, Hear, Speak, And Do”  
Rev. Bill Freeman

**James 2:13-17**

*For judgement will be without mercy to anyone who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgement. What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill’, and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.*

**Mark 7:31-37**

*Then he returned from the region of Tyre, and went by way of Sidon towards the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis. They brought to him a deaf man who had an impediment in his speech; and they begged him to lay his hand on him. He took him aside in private, away from the crowd, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spat and touched his tongue. Then looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, ‘Ephphatha’, that is, ‘Be opened.’ And immediately his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. Then Jesus ordered them to tell no one; but the more he ordered them, the more zealously they proclaimed it. They were astounded beyond measure, saying, ‘He has done everything well; he even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak.’*

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*See, Hear, Speak, And Do*

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Kathleen and I just spent our vacation driving around America, visiting family and friends. 23 states and the District of Columbia. 7,500 miles. I could see again that we have a beautiful country. From California to Washington, DC, from the Gulf of Mexico to Lake Michigan, it’s an awesome place to see. I know we have our problems - convincing bigoted cops that Black Lives Matter, reminding presidential candidates of the

words on the Statue of Liberty, “Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free” - but I could see these past few weeks that God truly has blessed America. (And, of course, because I’m a United Church of Christ minister, I can see that God has also blessed countries in Europe, Asia, Africa, South America, etc.)

I felt like we were living out that old Woody Guthrie song, “This Land Is Your Land.” “This land is your land, this land is my land. From California to the New York Island. From the red wood forest to the Gulf Stream waters. This land was made for you and me.” This land was made for you and me. This land was made for males and females. This land was made for all the people under the rainbow.

And this land was made for the Have-Lots and for the Have-Nots. Although some people don’t seem to be able to see that, even people who claim that their favorite book is the Bible.

“Blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear,” Jesus says. Most of us have eyes to see, ears to hear, a mouth to speak, and hands and feet to do. So, do we use them? Do we use them to see those in need, to hear those in need, to speak out for those in need, to do good for those in need? When we see, hear, speak, and do good for those in need, I believe Jesus calls us blessed.

How about you? Do you see, hear, speak, and do good for those in need? Now maybe you can’t. Maybe your circumstances are such that you can’t help those in need. “Pastor, what do you mean, help those in need? I’m one of those in need who needs the help.” I understand. You can’t give someone the shirt off your back, if you yourself don’t have a shirt on your back. I’m talking about those of us who can help those in need. But, of course, you also can’t give the shirt off your back to someone in need, if you can’t see someone in need. Are we able to see someone in need?

Jesus saw a blind man, as Jesus was walking along. His disciples asked Jesus why the man was born blind: was it because he sinned or because his parents sinned? Jesus said: Neither; he was

born blind so that you could see that “I am the light of the world,” and so that you could see this. Then Jesus made mud out of dirt and saliva, rubbed it on the man’s eyes, and told him to go wash it off. When the man did, he could see.

How many of us were blind until Jesus made us see? I don’t mean we were physically blind. I mean we were spiritually blind. We didn’t see those in need. And then we came across Jesus. Or Jesus came across us. Now, Jesus didn’t rub mud on our eyes and tell us to wash it off. But just learning about Jesus, just experiencing Jesus, just communing with Jesus made us see those in need: in need of a bed, in need of a meal, in need of a hug. In other words, we could see once we encountered, “The light of the world.”

What will we do with that light? Will we use it just to light our own path? Or will we use it to light the path of others? Of course, this is a United Church of Christ church, so you get to decide for yourself what to do: Light your own path? Or light the path of others? And of course, I’m a United Church of Christ minister, so I get to suggest to you what to do with that light. And I would suggest you do both: Light your own path. And light the path of others.

How do you do that? Well, I believe: You light your own path with prayers to God. You light your own path by following Jesus. And you light your own path by listening to the Holy Spirit within you and all around you. And, I believe: You light the path of others by sharing the love of God with them. You light the path of others by helping them to follow Jesus. And you light the path of others by encouraging them to listen to the Holy Spirit within them and all around them. Then eventually, I believe, they will see those in need: in need of a bed, in need of a meal, in need of a hug.

A deaf man with a speech impediment was brought to Jesus. Jesus took the man aside, put his fingers in the man’s ears, and touched the man’s tongue. Then Jesus looked up to heaven, sighed, and said to him, “Ephphatha,” which means, “Be opened.” Immediately the man’s ears were opened and his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. People were astounded. They said of Jesus, “He makes the deaf to hear and

the mute to speak.”

How many of us were deaf and mute until Jesus made us hear and speak? I don't mean we were physically deaf and mute. I mean we were spiritually deaf and mute. We didn't hear and speak out for those in need. And then we came across Jesus. Or Jesus came across us. Now, Jesus didn't put his fingers in our ears or touch our tongue. But just learning about Jesus, just experiencing Jesus, just communing with Jesus made us hear and speak out for those in need: in need of a bed, in need of a meal, in need of a hug. In other words, we could hear and speak once we encountered, “The light of the world.”

Do we see, not just with our eyes, but with our souls? Do we hear, not just with our ears, but with our souls? Do we speak, not just with our mouths, but with our souls? Do we see God in everyone we meet? Do we hear the Holy Spirit within and around us? Do we speak out for the justice of Jesus?

I know there are people who see and hear those in need. But then they speak out against those in need. They blame those in need for being in need. And they don't want the government, and some don't even want churches, including this church, to do something for those in need. Now, I also know that those who speak out against helping those in need say they don't want those in need to become “dependent” on government, and maybe even “dependent” on churches. The beauty of being in a United Church of Christ church: You get to decide for yourself who's right in all this. And the beauty of being a United Church of Christ minister is: I get to decide for myself who's right in all this. To paraphrase the Bible: As for me and my house, we will follow the Lord.

I remember back in college having a late-night discussion or two - of course, back in college it was called a bull session - about which we'd rather be: Would we rather be deaf or would we rather be blind? I don't remember what I said back then. In reality, we don't usually get to choose whether we want to be deaf or blind. Sometimes one or the other or both just happen.

I went to the eye doctor a few years ago. I was having trouble seeing out of my left eye. I could barely make out the big E on the eye chart. I thought: Oh, no; I'm going blind. My doctor

looked in my left eye and said, “Hmmm? You’re a little young for this, but you have cataracts in your left eye.” Then he looked in my right eye. “Hmmm? You have cataracts in your right eye, too.” Then he said, “The nurse will come in to tell you what you need to do.” Well, I kind of knew what I needed to do, but when the nurse came in, I said, “So, you’re here to tell me what vegetables I need to eat and what vitamins I need to take to get rid of the cataracts?” She chuckled and said, “Ah, no. You need to have surgery.” “Yeah, I know.” Well, I had the surgery, and now I see better than ever. Obviously, I wish I’d had an encounter with Jesus and some mud, instead of an encounter with my eye doctor, but it worked out.

We are so dependent on our senses. We depend on our sense of sight to see the beauty all around us. We depend on our sense of hearing to hear wonderful music. We depend on our sense of smell to smell fragrant flowers. We depend on our sense of taste to taste our favorite food. And we depend on our sense of touch to touch the hand of our loved one. I also think we depend on our sixth sense: our sense of caring, our sense of compassion, our sense of justice. I think we are born with an innate sense of wanting to help people in need.

I think James, the brother of Jesus, was born with that sixth sense: that sense of caring, that sense of compassion, that sense of justice, that innate sense of wanting to help people in need. In the Book of James he tells us, “What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill,’ and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.” But I believe that even a person’s dead faith, faith that is killed because it has no works, can be brought back to life, can be “Born Again,” if you will, by, “The light of the world.”

Feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and welcome the stranger, Jesus says. This church does that, with our Saturday Breakfast, our Food Pantry, our Clothing Closet, and our Residential Assistance Program. Plus, we have our Missions budget, and our Minister’s Discretionary Fund, money that you give to me to help those in need. Why do we do all that? Because of our faith in

Jesus, and in the teachings of Jesus. Our faith in Jesus, and in the teachings of Jesus, give us eyes to see those in need, ears to hear those in need, a mouth to speak out for those in need, and hands and feet to do good for those in need. So our faith in Jesus, and in the teachings of Jesus, cause us to do good works. And as Jesus' brother James indicates: Because we have works our faith is alive!

It's like the hymn, "We Sing The New Religion," where it says, "We sing the new religion, the fellowship of man." Of course, that new religion is about 2,000 years old. Jesus taught his followers about the fellowship of man. And because I'm a United Church of Christ minister I can acknowledge that other religious leaders, like Buddha and Gandhi, taught their followers about the fellowship of man, too. Our hope is that the fellowship of man will spread to all religions and all people all around the world.

Towards the end of our vacation, I was contacted by a couple in our area who have a baby and who needed help. They needed money for a motel room. I said: Don't bother me! I'm still on vacation! No. Wait. I didn't say that. I took money from the Minister's Discretionary Fund, your money, and put them up in a motel for a night, until their governmental assistance came through. On behalf of that family let me say: Thank you for your faith in Jesus and for your faith in the teachings of Jesus. And thank you for your works that make our faith alive. May we - you and I - always see, hear, speak, and do good for those in need.

Let us pray...

*God of Love,  
Help us to see those in need.  
Help us to hear those in need.  
Help us to speak out for those in need.  
And help us to do good for those in need.  
Now and forevermore.  
By the power of the Holy Spirit.  
And in the name of Jesus.  
Amen.*

## THE GOLDEN RULE

*What is hateful to you  
do not do to others.*

Judaism

*Do to others what you would  
have them do to you.*

Christianity

*None of you believes until he wishes for his  
brother what he wishes for himself.*

Islam

*Do not do to others  
what would cause pain if done to you.*

Hinduism

*Hurt not others in ways that you yourself  
would find hurtful.*

Buddism

*Regard your neighbor's gain as your gain,  
and your neighbor's loss as your loss.*

Taoism

*Do not do to others  
what you do not want them to do to you.*

Confucianism

*Treat other people  
as you'd want to be treated in their situation.*

Humanism