

Open up

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"*Ephphatha!*" Jesus cries in Mark 7. "Open up!" In that passage the command is specifically about hearing and speech. But the image seems emblematic of the gospel in many ways. The rolling away of the tombstone bespeaks an opening from death to life, despair to hope, fear to hospitality. And again and again Jesus appears, both in the flesh and by the Spirit, to open doors where there were walls, to open hearts that had been stony cold, to open eyes for seeing and ears for hearing. To open us to one another and to what he called the kingdom in our midst. *Ephphatha!*

I hear that theme once more as I return to the story of the rich man and Lazarus, though here more as plea than command. The rich man seems representative of so much blindness to the other, so much of humanity's "seeing without seeing." For God's sake, Mr. Rich Man, look and see what's right in front of you. See your neighbor Lazarus. See him, and then see yourself as his neighbor!

Yet as I thought about that urgency of vision, I came to think of the old argument of some of the Reformers about the role of the senses in bearing the Gospels. *Fides ex auditu*—"faith comes *by hearing*"—those strict Protestants had quoted, transforming that phrase from St. Paul into a battle slogan. The medieval church, so rich in appeal to smell and touch and taste and sight, had seduced and misled. Those senses were thus treacherous. The word alone, preached and heard, was the vehicle for our redeeming. The door to be opened was the ear.

Of course I would generally tend to oppose (or at least seek corrective clarification of) that teaching. The word, after all, comes to us not only spoken or written but incarnate and sacramental, seen, tasted, felt, even smelled. (Besides, it seems

awfully naïve to think the ear immune to seduction.)

Nonetheless, thinking about Jesus' words as a call to seeing brings me back to that old sense of a conflict between the senses. For often we *do* need another's voice to call us away from our, yes, seduced ways of *watching* of the world. And often as well we *do* need words that open the imagination of our hearts to what our eyes have not yet discerned.

Sometimes we need to hear in order to see. And again Jesus speaks: *Ephphatha*.