**Bluff Co-operating Parish, 9 September 2018** (Reading Mark 7.31-37)

 **“How well he does everything! He even cause the deaf to hear and the dumb to speak”** (Mark 7.37)

I have just read a book “Dewey” about a cat adopted into a library in Iowa. Two different types of people who wanted to meet him:

[a] those who came from far away to meet this **celebrity**, and
[b] those who **spent time** with Dewey and thus learnt about him through time.

This is like many people who reacted to Jesus – eg Mark 1.32-34, Mark 6.33

Note also the reaction of Nazareth (Mark 6.1-6) who did not believe [a], & were uninterested in [b].

Jesus wasn’t interested in publicity that leads [a], but was interested in [b].

In this story it is easy to focus on the charisma/magic of Jesus, trying to explain what went on, trying to recreate his healing ministry, and although this might at times be what God wants, sadly it largely misses the point, both then and now. It is to fall into the trap of [a].

Jesus spent time with his Father and thus learnt about him ie [b]. Surely we should do the same!

It is easy to be a church that seeks the novel, the different, in hopes of gaining publicity, even merely local publicity, so that folk know the church is still there. After all we want folk to come.

But there is a real danger that this will miss the point. We end up being & focussing on [a] (celebrity)

It is harder to spend time with folk, getting to know and love them [b] It is harder to focus on ordinary people & their needs – something this church seems to do well!

I say this not to heap praise on you, but to heap praise on the God who lives in you and works through you. For you know the value of being close to God, and helping others do the same.

Isaiah 35.5-6: “**The deaf will hear … and those who cannot speak will shout for joy**”.

Jesus fulfilled this, and even the people who were looking for celebrity could see this [TEXT], though they neither knew the prophecy (they were not Jews, as they were living in the gentile region of Decapolis) nor recognised this as implying the presence of God.

*Maybe* some became Christians, changing from seeking celebrity to seeking God [a] to [ b]

Getting closer to God is about worship, prayer, Bible study and mutual reflection.

If our life as a church achieves this it will inevitably help others do the same.

Even if folk start coming or connect with us for [a] TEXT, our closeness to God will lead them to [b].