

‘*Ephphatha*, be opened!’ Jesus sighed and said to the man who was deaf and had an impediment in his speech.

Ephphatha is Aramaic, the common language of Galilee in Jesus’ time, akin to him lapsing into broad Yorkshire.

It only happens nine times in the Greek Gospels,

Talitha Cum, Abba, Raka, Mammon, Korban, Hosanna,

Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani, Rabboni,

making the hairs prickle on the back of your neck,

as if Jesus, the Son of God, breaks through, on tape.

Clearly Jesus didn’t have a speech impediment in that

Ephphatha is the tongue twister of stutterers’ nightmares,

involving some deft moving of the tongue,

a word to be avoided at all costs.

It’s an instance of looking at what harms you to heal you.

We tend to give a wide berth to the things we dread,

but daring to look them in the eye can surprise us.

Even monsters can turn into pussy cats when we face them.

The Israelites wandering in the wilderness for forty years
were plagued by deadly vipers until Moses hit on the idea
of making a bronze snake, impaling it on a stick,
holding it up high and getting everyone to look at it.

They faced their fears and realised their foe was mortal.

So many snake bites are not deadly per se,

it's our reaction to them,

the massive adrenalin surge which sees us off.

'Don't panic, Mr Mainwaring!' is seasoned advice.

The Lord God turns curses into blessings, declares Genesis.

Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani -

My God, My God, what have you forsaken me?

Jesus applied the bronze snake to himself,
turning the curse of public execution into a blessing.
'Look at me when I am lifted up
and even the grisliest death will hold no terrors for you.
If I can face utter abandonment and rise again, so can you:
Talitha cum, arise, my love, my fair one and come away.'

But why wait until death?

Ephphatha, Jesus says to us who are spiritually tongue-tied.

Open up to love, to forgiveness, to life in all its fullness.

Jesus sets my norm, because he was so profligate,

with all that bread, all that wine, all that healing.

Don't be mean.

Say to Jesus, '*Rabboni*, My Master.' Then walk his talk.

Open up your wallet, your prejudices, your life, your heart
and let love gabble away and flood your world.