

The Third Sunday after Epiphany
St. Matthew 8:1-13
January 22nd, 2017
Sts. Peter & Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church, UAC
Greenville, SC
Rev. Fr. Jerry Dulas

You Can Make Me Clean

In Nomine Iesu!

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit before Sermon:

O Lord, send out Thy Light and Thy Truth, let them lead us. O Lord, open Thou my lips, that my mouth may show forth Thy praise. O Lord, graciously preserve me, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected. Amen.

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior + Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Evangelist St. Matthew begins the eighth chapter by saying, “When He had come down from the mountain.” When I see readings beginning like this, my first thought is to ask, “What came before?” What mountain is the Evangelist St. Matthew talking about? The mountain to which he is referring is the mountain upon which our Lord gave the Sermon on the Mount. After instructing His disciples in all things, our Lord comes down from the mountain and is encountered by the crowds. The crowds desire His mercy; to receive from our Lord + Jesus some relief from the miseries of this life.

To this end, we are given by the Evangelist St. Matthew a narrative of our Lord’s encounter with two individuals who are suffering the miseries of this life in two different ways: one, has a disease—leprosy, and one is watching someone dear to him suffer from a disease—paralysis. And, as much as they are affected by disease is different, our Lord + Jesus deals with their suffering differently. In fact, there are several differences between these two individuals. One, suffers personally, and one is witnessing someone else’s suffering. One, is a Jew, and the other is a Gentile; a Roman centurion. One, has his suffering cured by our Lord through our Lord’s touch, and one needs only our Lord to speak a word, and his servant is healed.

But, amidst all of these differences, they still have one thing in common. They both possess faith. The leper expresses his faith by saying, “If you are willing, you can make me clean.” In other words, he is saying, “I believe you can heal me, if it is your desire.” Our Lord acknowledges this faith when He heals the leper in a unique way, or at least it would have seemed strange to the Jews: He touched the leper and the leper was healed. It was forbidden to touch lepers. This law was in place to stop the spread of the disease. However, just like one cannot stop having contact with their spouse or family when they are sick, so one who had leprosy would spread it to their loved ones, until that person, or people, were removed.

Consider that for a moment. Lepers had to not only deal with a disease which literally ate away their flesh, but they had to live apart from their loved ones. It was misery compounded for them. Their only solace was if they found a community of lepers with whom they could share their misery. Even though this gathering of lepers was done (as we see in the healing of the ten lepers from St. Luke), the gathering together of lepers in a community was forbidden, for the same reason as before, to stop the spread of the disease. So, if a leper truly followed the rules, he would have a lonely, miserable existence until his disease was cured. They were not even supposed to approach anybody else, especially if they did not have leprosy. Yet, this leper approached our Lord. Two things are evident in this act. One, it further shows the faith of the leper that this man + Jesus could cure him. And two, it shows the mercy

of our Lord, for He does not tell him to be gone, or shy away from him, but He does the most extraordinary thing: He touches the leper.

However, our Lord does not touch leprous skin, but He touches skin that has been just cleansed. This reveals that our Lord truly is Almighty God, that He is maker of Heaven and Earth; the One True God, Who has come down from Heaven to dwell with mankind, so that He might lift us out of our lonely, miserable lives by healing us in the one, true way it truly makes a difference. He heals us of the misery of sin. He wins for us forgiveness, life and salvation, by His perfect obedience and his one and for all time sacrifice on the tree of the holy cross; suffering our punishment—our misery—for our sakes. He became lonely and miserable to cure us of our misery and loneliness. He took on the leprosy of our sin on the cross, so that we might be made clean.

“If You are willing, You can make me clean,” the leper says. His words echo our words, “Lord, if you are willing, You can take away my sin, and cleanse me from all unrighteousness.” And our Lord + Jesus says to the leper and to us, “I am willing; be cleansed.” That is why we come here today, to once again be cleansed from our sins; to hear once more the words that we desire to hear, “You are forgiven; You are cleansed.” The Lord + Jesus is willing to cleanse you, and give you His Holy Ghost, so that you receive once again, and in more abundance: faith. Faith to believe that the promises of God are true, and that they are for you. We come here today to have our faith strengthened, so that the infirmities of the soul might be healed by our Lord, and we might cling to Him once more in faith.

And for us He does not just say the Word, but He gives us a meal, which serves as a testament to our Lord’s loving-kindness toward us. Our Lord touches us with His Body and Blood, in, with, and under the bread and wine, so that we might be strengthened in our faith, and then we are able to love God and love one another even more; the Holy Ghost working behind the scenes through the means to create and sustain faith and life in all those who hear and believe.

But, our Lord’s mercy toward mankind is revealed even further in today’s Gospel reading, for we are presented by the Evangelist St. Matthew with a Roman centurion—a Gentile. Surely, the Lord would turn this “outsider” away, or at least begin to turn him away, as we have seen from other Gentiles our Lord encounters. No, however, our Lord does not turn him away. Instead, he allows this Gentile centurion to instruct us and all the Jews present on what faith truly is. The leper is healed by our Lord’s touch, and the Lord even offers to accompany the centurion to his servant and heal him in person.

Yet, the centurion knows that the Lord is a busy Lord. And, the centurion understands that the Lord + Jesus possesses all authority in Heaven and Earth. For, just as the centurion can accomplish things simply by saying the word, “Go”, or “Come”, so too, can the Lord + Jesus heal his servant by just saying the word. Our Lord’s response, “Assuredly, I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel!” The centurion also shows one of the fruits of faith: humility. For what does he say? “Lord, *I am not worthy* that you should come under my roof. But only speak a word and my servant will be healed.” The centurion admits his unworthiness. When we submit our requests to our Lord God we too should acknowledge our unworthiness. As Luther wrote in his explanation of the fifth petition of the Lord’s prayer, where we pray “forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us,”: “we are neither worthy of things for which we pray, nor have we deserved them; but we ask that He would give them all to us by grace.”

Therefore, our Lord seeing the centurion’s humility and faith, is gracious to him and heals his servant. The Lord did not need to be present to heal him of his paralysis. The servant was healed, and the centurion no longer had to watch him live in suffering. Such it is with us, not only when someone we love is healed of an earthly infirmity, but even more so, when we witness those who live daily in impenitent sin, repent, humble themselves before the Lord, and receive forgiveness; they receive the cleansing of their soul. This is a cause for our rejoicing, for that which was lost, has been found, and

that which was spiritually dead, has been made alive. Further, that which lived their life in misery and loneliness, has shed off the burdens of this life, and has placed their hope in the promise of an eternal life with our Lord and with all those with whom we share a common faith.

We experience a foretaste of that feast, when we come before this altar to receive our Lord's Body and Blood in bread and wine. Certainly, we join together as a congregation in fellowship with one another, but as we do so, we are also joining together with all the saints in Heaven; those who have gone to their eternal reward in Heaven before us. And, we humble ourselves before the Lord and say with the centurion, "Lord, I am not worthy that Thou shouldst come under my roof; but speak the word only that Thy servant may be healed." These are actually the words that the minister historically and anciently said, as they prepared themselves to receive Holy Communion. The minister says these words three times, beating his breast at the words unworthy as a reminder to himself, that he is but a servant, and that he only serves the Triune God purely out of divine grace and mercy.

This would be a good practice for all of us to adopt. So, that we have a reminder whenever we are about to receive our Lord's Body and Blood in bread and wine, that we are indeed unworthy sinners, who only receive this gift by our Lord's grace; there is no worthiness in us. We are only worthy because of the Holy Ghost who dwells within us, and creates the faith to receive this great gift freely and humbly.

Our Lord + Jesus Christ comes down from the mountain of Heaven to us today, so that He might heal us of all our infirmities, but especially does He come down out of Heaven to reveal to us that He has put on our flesh—God has become man—so that He might fulfill the whole Law and will of God, and suffer our punishment on the tree of the holy cross. In this sacrifice, He wins for us forgiveness, life and salvation, and bestows upon our heads the crown of life. Therefore, we stand before Him, cleansed of our sins, and healed of our diseases, we give thanks to Him for His great mercy, which has taken away our loneliness and misery, and given us joy everlasting. And, we can join our voice to the words of the Introit, "The Lord reigns! Let the earth rejoice! Let the multitude of isles be glad!" Let us be glad that our Redeemer and Savior reigns for all eternity and we live with Him cleansed and healed from all sin, and the power of the devil, for all eternity. In the Name of our Lord + Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit after Sermon:

Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy Name give glory! I will extol Thee, O Lord, and I will praise Thy Name forever and ever. Amen.

The Votum:

The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.

Announcements of a Spiritual Nature

Prayers

Orlin Palm

The Friends and Family of Mildred Muir

Our New President and Vice-President

For those who have suffered hurt since the decision of Roe v. Wade

Recitation of the Catechism

The Ten Commandments