

January 23, 2011

SOLI DEO GLORIA
3rd Sunday after the Epiphany

Good Shepherd, Novi

MATTHEW 8:1-13
JESUS BRINGS COMPLETE HEALING.

In the name + of Jesus.

People long for healing. Hospitals continue to expand. Charities gratefully receive your donations so that researchers and doctors can find a cure. You can walk 60 miles in three days to benefit those afflicted with breast cancer, or you can make a pledge for someone who does. You can make appointments with general practitioners or specialists. You can get everything from therapy to pharmaceuticals to prosthetics. It is safe to say that the (post-Flood) world has never known better medicine, better care, and longer life-expectancy than we know today. And yet, people are sick and diseased and dying. People long for healing.

Naaman was the commander of the Syrian army and a valiant soldier. He was highly prized by his country and his king. But Naaman had a wretched skin disease which rendered him useless. Naaman longed for healing. His king longed for his healing. Money was not an issue. 750 pounds of silver, 150 pounds of gold, and a fresh, new wardrobe was a price gladly paid for a cure. Even though Syria and Israel were enemies, that did not keep Naaman from going to his enemy to find his cure. He longed for healing. He longed to be restored to his family, to his king, and to his country.

St. Matthew mentions both a leper and an officer in an enemy army. The leper had a wretched skin disease which banished him from his family, his community, and from God's presence. He longed for healing. The Roman centurion had a servant who was paralyzed and suffering. Because he cherished both his servant and the boy's service, he longed for him to be healed.

You know the feeling too. Whether it is because your body suffers aches and pains or because your heart suffers because your loved one has aches and pains, you long for healing. You want to be delivered from sickness and disease. You want to be spared any reminder of your frailty and your mortality. But you don't have any prophet of Israel to go to. You will not receive a house call from Jesus. He is not here to lay his hands on you. You can only pray, take your medicine, and hope. And oh, how helpless you feel! You want a miracle, pretty confident that you will not get one. You wonder if God even God cares.

Dear Christian, your problem is not that you are sick, but that you are sinful. Your **heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. (Jeremiah 17:9)** This is why you trust God only when all is well but question him when you are ailing. You are fickle, not faithful. You are unclean and, therefore, cut off from him who is holy and pure.

Repent, and learn to confess with the centurion, **"Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof." (Matthew 8:8)** *For my heart is impure. My mind is defiled. My mouth is filthy. I have not kept my hands from selfish deeds. I have not kept my feet from walking in the path of the wicked. Although I am subject to your authority, I have not kept your commands. I have rebelled. I do not deserve your presence, much less your blessing. No, Lord, I am only worthy of death and hell. For the unclean should be banished; and the guilty should be punished.*

Though you know that you are not worthy, still you long to be free from pain, disease, weakness, and death. Therefore, learn to pray with the leper, **“Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.” (Matthew 8:2)** For, it is not about your worthiness; it is about Jesus’ willingness! And your Lord is willing to cleanse you of everything that defiles you. **Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. “I am willing,” he said. “Be clean!” (Matthew 8:3)** Jesus brings complete healing.

I am sure that the great crowds were shocked to see Jesus reach out and touch the leprous man. To touch a man who was unclean would render Jesus himself unclean. But when Jesus touched him, **immediately he was cured of his leprosy. (Matthew 8:3)** Jesus cleansed the leper. In turn, Jesus absorbed all of his sickness and impurity, as Isaiah had foretold: **“He took up our infirmities and carried our diseases.” (Matthew 8:17; cp Isaiah 53:4)** Jesus brings complete healing.

Now, before you say that Jesus has done nothing like this for you, recognize that he has done even more for you. God has reached out and not just touched you with his hand, he has taken on your flesh. He became man to endure all of the pain and suffering that men have earned for their sins. He covered himself in your filth and went to the cross as one defiled. He assumed your curse and was banished as one who was unclean. That is why **we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted (Isaiah 53:4)** – and he was! For the unclean should be banished; and the guilty should be punished. He has taken your sin. He has endured your death. He has suffered your hell.

This is how much God loves you. Though God was viewed by you as the enemy, he has brought you complete healing of your sin. The cost was astronomical, but God paid it willingly. He has redeemed you – ***not with gold or silver, but with his holy, precious blood and with his innocent sufferings and death. (Luther’s Small Catechism)*** Jesus has brought you complete healing. He washed you clean in your baptism. Through his minister, he extends his hand to give you the body and blood which were shed for you. He does not need to come under your roof and make a special house call just for you. As the centurion recognized, Jesus is true God and his word has authority. **“Just say the word, and (your) servant will be healed.” (Matthew 8:8)**

And Jesus does declare his authoritative word. For Holy Baptism is not mere water, any more than Naaman’s plunge into the Jordan River was just a bath. God attaches his word and promise to these waters. Therefore, when you were baptized, God made you clean. Holy Communion is much more than a remembrance. It is a sacred meal with God’s word attached to it. **“Take and eat. Take and drink. It is for you. For the forgiveness of sins.”** Holy Absolution is not fond wishes. It is a declaration with God’s authority attached to it, that **“If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven.” (John 20:23)** So we confess with the Roman centurion, **“Just say the word, and (your) servant will be healed.” (Matthew 8:8)** And Jesus responds: **“I am willing. Be clean!” (Matthew 8:3)**

Do not question if God cares for you as you struggle with your aches and pains. He has shown you his compassion by taking away your sin. And while he may allow you to endure aches, pains, sickness, and disease, he will finally give you the healing you pray for. Your miracle may not come now. But it will definitely come on the Last Day. You see, the worst that sickness can do to you is to send you to your grave. But Jesus has conquered the grave. On the Last Day, your risen Savior will come and speak his authoritative word. Jesus will raise your body imperishable, incorruptible, and immortal.

There will be no more sore muscles or aching joints, no brittle bones or worn out bodies, no disease or death. There will only be complete healing and joy beyond expression.

Then, your Savior will bring you to the everlasting feast. You will take your place with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, with Naaman, the centurion, and all who are cleansed. For Jesus was willing to cleanse you. He brings complete healing, and he grants life everlasting.

In the name of the Father and of the Son + and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.