Jesu Juva

**The Third Sunday after Epiphany**

Text: St. Matthew 8:1-13

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

When one reads the Gospel text appointed for this, the third Sunday after the Feast of the Epiphany of our Lord, the most common reaction is probably to compare oneself with the centurion, or more specifically, to compare one’s faith with that of the faith of the centurion. We might ask of ourselves, *“Would Jesus commend my faith in such glowing terms? Is my faith as great as the centurion’s?”*

Yet, are these not the wrong questions to ask? Of what use to your salvation would the answers be? Would an affirmative answer assure you of heaven and eternal life? Would a negative answer mean that you are condemned to eternal punishment in the fires of hell?

I submit that to ask such questions, to compare yourself and your faith to that of the leper or the centurion, indicates that your faith is not *nearly* as great as their faith—not even close! To wonder if Christ would commend your faith could mean only one thing; your faith is misplaced. It means that your faith is not in Christ, but in your faith itself. It means that you trust not in the gracious mercy of God, but in your own ability to produce a faith worthy of heaven and your salvation.

True, our Lord does commend the faith of the centurion, even as He does many others, but not for its quality, as though the centurion’s faith is somehow different from and therefore superior to the faith of other believers, but rather for where and in whom his faith is placed—in Jesus Christ, his Savior and ours.

Therefore, I doubt very much whether either the centurion or the leper evaluated their faith before they worshiped Jesus and prayed for His help. They simply and confidently believed. Yes, they heard the words of our Lord and believed in Him as the Son of God, the promised Messiah. They believed what the beloved apostle, St. John, would later write of our Lord in the fourth Gospel: *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.”*

They believed Jesus is God, the Sovereign Lord of heaven and earth and all creation. They believed that all creation must submit to His Word and so they looked to the Word of God alone.

They believed that the Word of Jesus is performative; that is to say, God’s Word performs exactly what He commands. Therefore, they believed that when Jesus speaks, all of creation is affected by His Word, and what is said by our Lord is precisely what is done. They believed that when Jesus speaks *all* creation listens. For this is the same Christ who spoke into the darkness, formless and void, and from the spoken Word that issued from His lips He breathed into existence all that is known and unknown, all that is seen and unseen, all things made that have been made.

This is the Christ whom the leper worshiped and to whom the centurion confessed his great faith. They had heard His Word and faith was conceived within them. They heard the very same Word that has been manifested among you, the same Word which I now declare, that the Word of Christ is the power of God unto salvation for all who will believe, but foolishness to those who are perishing.

This faith, the faith Jesus commends, is now and has always been at the very core of our Christian faith and confession even from the very earliest days of the Church. Therefore, we Christians trust in the power of God’s Word. We leave everything to Him and His divine grace, mercy, and compassion because we believe and understand that our entire life and salvation depend completely upon Him. We testify that all authority belongs to God and God alone. Thus, the faith of a Christian makes no demands of God; it simply trusts in the Word and the will of God to do what He declares and promises. Christian faith believes that God does all things well.

So we can see that great faith, the faith commended by Jesus, is not faith in oneself, nor is it faith in one’s faith. Such faith never worries over its quality or lack thereof; it is faith that confidently believes in Jesus and His promises. It is a faith that knows its own weakness; it knows that it often suffers from doubt and so it prays, *“Lord, I believe; help my unbelief.”* This faith knows that if it were to be measured on the scales of divine judgment for its quality alone, all would be lost. And yet, one who holds this faith is not lost because this faith finds its strength not in its quality or quantity, but in Christ alone.

One who holds such faith knows that he or she is not worthy of Christ, that he or she is not deserving of His mercy, but is willing to wait patiently under His table to receive even the smallest crumb of His divine goodness. Knowing that he or she is an unworthy sinner one does not presume that our Lord owes to them anything. Instead, with humble faith, a Christian’s prayer echoes that of the centurion; *“Lord, I am not worthy that You should come under my roof. But only speak a word, and I will be healed.”*

This is the faith of a Christian, a faith that lays hold of Jesus and will not let Him go; a faith that wrestles with God and refuses to let Him go until it receives His blessing—the blessing of forgiveness, salvation, and eternal life. This is a faith that knows that the only place true help is to be found is where one finds Jesus present in His flesh. Such faith *“…is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”* This is a faith that trusts Jesus enough to confidently pray, *“Thy will be done.”*

Therefore, true faith does not say to Jesus, *“Lord, if you are able, will you make me clean?”* True faith says to Jesus, *“Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean.”*

To such faith, our Lord Jesus replies, *“I am willing.”* *“I am willing to give up the glory of heaven and take on the form of a bond servant and come in the flesh of men. I am willing to go to death on the Cross that you might be healed of the leprosy of your sin. I am willing to suffer the wrath demanded by the Law of My Father so He may become your Father. I am willing to make payment for your sins because you cannot. I am willing that My Blood be poured out upon the ground in death, in order that the same Blood may be poured into you to give you life. I am willing to suffer all that Satan and hell has to throw at Me, to take your disease and your suffering and put it to death in My Body on the Cross, so that, your body can be glorified and made clean and whole, never to suffer again the pain of this life, but be joined body and soul together, to be with Me forever.”*

So, when He had come down from Heaven great multitudes followed Him. And behold, a sinner came and worshiped Jesus, saying, *“Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean.”* Then Jesus stretched out His arms as He was nailed to the Cross. His Blood poured into a cup and touched the lips of sinners like you and me, and Jesus said, *“I am willing; be cleansed, for in the Blood of this Cup is the forgiveness of all your sins.”*

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

 Soli Deo Gloria

Rev. Raymond D. Parent II

Our Savior Evangelical Lutheran Church

Crestview, Florida

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