

The Third Sunday after Michaelmas (Trinity 21)  
St. John 4:46-54: "You're Covered."  
October 14/15, 2017 | Saude, Jerico, & Redeemer Lutheran Churches

**In Nomine Iesu**

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Dear heavenly Father, grant us grace through the Holy Spirit, that we learn to believe and daily give evidence of our faith, grow and increase in it, and truly glorify You in Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen. (adapted from Luther, *The House Postils*, p. 129)

*Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. (Rom. 1:7, etc.)*

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*The sermon text for this morning is taken from the fourth chapter of the Gospel according to St. John. We read selected verses in Jesus' name:*

So [Jesus] came again to Cana in Galilee, where He had made the water wine. And at Capernaum there was an official whose son was ill. When this man heard that Jesus had come from Judea to Galilee, he went to Him and asked Him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death. / So Jesus said to him, "Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe." / The official said to Him, "Sir, come down before my child dies." / Jesus said to him, "Go; your son will live." The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and went on his way. As he was going down, his servants met him and told him that his son was recovering. So he asked them the hour when he began to get better, and they said to him, "Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him." / The father knew that was the hour when Jesus had said to him, "Your son will live." And he himself believed, and all his household. / This was now the second sign that Jesus did when He had come from Judea to Galilee. <sup>(ESV)</sup>

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*These are Your words, heavenly Father. Sanctify us by Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen. (Jn. 17:17)*

In Christ Jesus, through whom we are cleansed by the washing of water with the Word and clothed in His righteousness (Eph. 5:26-27), dear fellow redeemed:

All of us take risks of one sort or another, but in general we prefer safety and stability. We like to know where our next meal is coming from and how we will pay our bills in the future. In the event of sickness or injury, we have health insurance to cover medical expenses. We don't want to risk running out of money or options. Overall, we tend to be more cautious than reckless.

But this cautious approach does not work as well in spiritual things as in physical things. From our human perspective, there is great risk in a life of faith. The proverb directs us to "*Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding*" (3:5). And Jesus declares, "*Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed*" (Jn. 20:29). We are called to believe what God says, even though we have never seen Him, and even though His Word does not agree with our reason. That is a risky proposition. After all, we think, what if Christianity is not the one true religion? What if the Bible's teaching is not entirely true?

Even the Apostle Peter was concerned that faith in Jesus would not leave the disciples empty-handed. "*See, we have left everything and followed you,*" he said. "*What then will we have?*" (Mt.

19:27). It is as though Peter were saying, "Lord, we are taking a big risk here. We left our fishing business on the Sea of Galilee and have followed You through thick and thin. There must be some reward for this! Give us assurances that this will pay off someday."

## I

The official in our text for today was in a similar position. He took the risk of leaving the side of his dying son in the hope that Jesus would help. He must have tried every available remedy to help him get better, but nothing worked. If you were in his shoes, you would do the same thing. You would spare no expense and would try any procedure if it might save your child's life. This man heard that Jesus had come to the town of Cana not far from where the official lived in Capernaum. He may well have thought about Jesus before this, but his son was in no condition to journey where Jesus was in Judea. Now Jesus had come to Cana where He had changed water into wine, His first miracle.

The official hurried to find Him. He believed that Jesus could heal his son. That took a real leap of faith! In the history of mankind, who could heal with little more than a touch? Why did the man have such confidence that Jesus could do this? His appearance did not indicate any kind of special ability. Jesus looked just like any other man. Still the official came to Him and said, "Please come down and heal my son!" And Jesus replied, "*Unless you (people) see signs and wonders you will not believe.*" How would you react if this were said to you? The man's son was dying. He was desperate for help. He anxiously looked for Jesus. And then Jesus declared, "*Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe.*"

That was a great test of faith. The official might have turned on his heel and left right then. He could have unloaded on Jesus for not seeming to care about his little boy. Instead he persisted. "*Sir, come down before my child dies!*" he pleaded. And Jesus said, "*Go; your son will live.*" This was, quite simply, the call to believe. Jesus asked the man to trust what He said, even though there was no discernable evidence that something had taken place.

This scenario should be familiar to you, because you have experienced it yourself many times. For example, how do you know that God pours out His grace on a baby in Holy Baptism? You can't see any change take place in the infant. You don't see the bright presence of God. How do you know that your sins are actually forgiven in the Absolution? You often don't feel any different when the pastor speaks those words. How do you know that Jesus gives you His body and blood in Holy Communion? Any scientific examination would show that no such things are present and distributed. Or how can you be so sure that you will one day be reunited with your brothers and sisters in Christ who have died? You have never seen someone rise from the dead.

These examples are no different than the challenge the official faced. Would he take Jesus at His Word, or would he require further assurances, further action? And how is it for you? Is the Word of God enough for you? Or does it leave you unconvinced, unsatisfied? Do you doubt that the Lord loves you and forgives your sins, particularly the ones you are most ashamed of? Do you require proof of God's faithfulness beyond the promises of the Gospel, in earthly gains that can be quantified and measured? Do you harbor bitterness in your heart that God took someone away from you long before you were ready to give them up?

You and I do not pass these and other tests like them with flying colors. We are reluctant to take the risk of faith. It is hard to believe. We are like the man who cried out, *"I believe; help my unbelief!"* (Mk. 9:24). That is a proper prayer - "Help me!" "Have mercy upon me!" Because we cannot make ourselves believe better. We cannot make our faith stronger. Only God can do this, and He does it with the very thing that seems to require so much risk. He speaks His Word.

## II

The fact is that there is no actual risk at all in believing and following God's Word. The part of us that considers it so risky is our sinful nature, the old Adam. This part of us is like the child who just can't bring herself to jump into her daddy's arms in the pool. "What if he doesn't catch me?" she thinks. "What if I get water in my eyes and nose? What if it's too cold?" And she just won't jump no matter how many assurances her father gives her. Because of our sinful nature, we on our own will never take the plunge of faith. We do not have the ability or the interest to do it.

This is why God must create the new man of faith within a sinner. He must give the courage to step out of the darkness of sin and death and jump into the arms of a loving Father. "I will catch you," says God. "No harm will come to you. I will not let you drown. I will keep you safe." It is God's faithfulness that takes the risk out of faith. Remember what He has done for you. He cared enough about you to send His only Son to take your place. Jesus lived a holy life for you and died for you. He satisfied the requirement of God's law, and then bore His righteous anger for the world's sin. Would a God who did that for you ever fail you or forget about you? Would He refuse to forgive the sin that has already been blotted out by Jesus' blood?

The Lord has nothing to gain by lying to you, by making promises to you that He cannot keep. So when He promises that forgiveness, faith, and life are bestowed through the water and Word of Holy Baptism, when He declares that your sins are forgiven by the authority of Christ, when He urges you to eat and drink for the remission of your sins, when He promises to raise the dead on the last day—you can be sure that all of these promises are true and powerfully effective to save.

Like the peace of mind you have when property or fields are damaged, and all the damages are covered by insurance, so you have peace through the Word of Christ. The Gospel declares to you that **You're Covered**, clothed in Jesus' righteousness. What the Gospel declares, it also powerfully gives, because God's Word does not return to Him void, as Isaiah writes (55:11).

In today's Epistle lesson, St. Paul talks about the security we have in Christ. He urges us to *"put on the whole armor of God"* - *"the belt of truth," "the breastplate of righteousness,"* shoes readied *"by the gospel of peace," "the shield of faith," "the helmet of salvation,"* and *"the sword of the Spirit"* (Eph. 6:10-17). But how can we know if this spiritual armor is covering us, so that we do not succumb to the attacks of our spiritual enemies? Our armor is no more visible to our sight and senses than those enemies are.

St. Paul writes in another place, *"we walk by faith, not by sight"* (2Cor. 5:7). We *"put on the whole armor of God"* by trusting in Jesus our Savior. He is *"the Valiant One"* who fights for us and *"wins the victory in ev'ry field of battle"* (ELH 250/251). Everyone who believes and is baptized is safe in Him. Every child of God by faith is clothed in the armor of His grace and

righteousness. “[F]or in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ” (Gal. 3:26-27).

The official’s faith in Jesus was not disappointed. He “believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and went on his way.” Soon he learned that his son was healed at the very moment Jesus spoke His Word. The Lord had everything under control. He did not ignore the cry for help. Neither will He ignore you. The Lord hears your prayers, and He will save you. There is no risk in trusting His Word. Your Savior always keeps His promises.

*Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen.*

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