

Epiphany 3 – Vicar Lehne Sermon

Matthew 8:1-13: “Jesus Is the Ultimate Cure”

1/20/24; 1/21/24 | Saude, Jerico, & Redeemer Lutheran Churches

In Nomine Iesu

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O God, our heavenly Father, there are times when our weaknesses are too great for us to bear. When we are helpless, please send your only begotten Son to be our help by either taking our weaknesses away or helping us bear the burdens of our weaknesses. In his name we pray. Amen.

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

The sermon text for today is taken from the eighth chapter of the Gospel according to St. Matthew. We read selected verses in Jesus’ name:

¹ When [Jesus] came down from the mountain, great crowds followed him. ² And behold, a leper came to him and knelt before him, saying, “Lord, if you will, you can make me clean.” ³ And Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, “I will; be clean.” And immediately his leprosy was cleansed.

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

In Christ Jesus, who is our ultimate cure, dear fellow redeemed:

Benjamin Franklin once said, “[I]n this world, nothing is certain except death and taxes.” But I think that a third thing needs to be added to that list: sickness. You could eat nothing but healthy food, drink lots of water, get just the right amount of sleep every night, wash your hands regularly with soap and water, and clean everything that could possibly be contaminated in your house; and you would still get sick eventually.

Getting sick is a miserable and frustrating thing. Depending on the type of sickness you get and the severity of it, you could lose your voice, your head could hurt, you could become so weak that it’s difficult for you to move, or perhaps the worst thing of all, you could have to take really nasty tasting medicine. And if that’s not bad enough, you may even have to cancel plans that you’ve been looking forward to, or you may fall behind on important work that you have to get done. Getting sick really can put you in your weakest and most helpless state.

When you are in this state, you have two options: you could ignore your weakness and helplessness and try to power through on your own, which usually results in your sickness getting even worse, or you could admit your weakness and helplessness and turn to others for help. But who should you turn to? Family? Friends? A doctor? While all of these people can be a great help to us when we are helpless, there is one person who can help us more than any of them: Jesus.

In our reading for today, we hear about two men who were at their weakest and most helpless state. One of them was a leper, a man who had a disease that made him ceremonially unclean

and unable to be a part of Jewish society. The other was a centurion, a Roman commander who was in charge of about a hundred men. The centurion himself was not suffering from any physical weakness, but he was still at his weakest and most helpless point. This was because he had a servant who was not just suffering terribly from paralysis, but, as we find out in Luke 7, was also near death (Luke 7:2), and there was nothing he could do about it. These two men could have ignored their weakness and helplessness and powered through on their own, but they didn't. They realized that they needed help, and the person who they turned to for help was Jesus.

The leper and the centurion believed that Jesus had the power to give them the help that they needed. Now, if Jesus was a mere man, then believing that he had any real power at all would be foolishness. After all, no man can miraculously heal someone's sicknesses or disabilities. But what did Jesus do? He touched the leper with his hand and said, "[B]e clean" (verse 3), and the leper was immediately cleansed of his leprosy. He said to the centurion, "[L]et it be done for you as you have believed" (verse 13), and the centurion's servant "was healed at that very moment" (verse 13). By having mercy on these two men and healing the leper and the centurion's servant, Jesus proved that he was not just a man. He is God.

Because Jesus is God, we can turn to him for help whenever we are suffering from physical weaknesses of any kind. Physical weaknesses are not just sicknesses or injuries. They are also everything else that we suffer from in this life, such as money problems, drama with friends or family, or when we have a seemingly impossible task before us. Whatever it is that we are suffering from, it can put us at our lowest point.

When we are struggling and feeling helpless, we have two options: we could ignore our helplessness and try to push through on our own, which would only make our suffering even worse, or we could turn to Jesus, who has the power to help us, no matter what state we're in, because he's God. Jesus loves us, and in his mercy, he comes to us in our time of need and lifts us out of our low points. And if we have to suffer for a little longer, he remains by our side and takes all our sufferings on himself and bears the burden of them for us. As Jesus says, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-30).

Even though we don't deserve any of this love and mercy that Jesus shows us, there are times when we don't think he is showing us enough love and mercy. We are grateful to Jesus when he delivers us from our suffering, but if he allows us to continue suffering, and that suffering seems to have no end in sight, we can become impatient with him and wonder if he is truly doing what is best for us.

We may think that we know what's best for us, but this is based on our imperfect human reasoning. In reality, God is the only one who knows what's best for us. It can be difficult for us to understand how our suffering could possibly be for our good when we are in the middle of it, and sometimes we may never know the reason for it. All we can do is trust, like the leper did, that no matter how God chooses to help us, be it by delivering us from our suffering or by helping us bear it, his will for us will be done. As the apostle Paul says, "[W]e know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his

purpose" (Romans 8:28). And we know that God's ultimate will for us will be done, because he has already delivered us from the deadliest disease of all, the disease of sin.

Sin is a disease that we are all born with, and it infected every part of us, not just our physical bodies, but also our thoughts, words, and actions. It is because of sin that all of our physical weaknesses exist in the first place. It is because of sin that we grow impatient with God when he doesn't help us in the way that we want him to. And it is because of sin that we will one day die. The disease of sin really puts us in our absolute weakest and most helpless state.

The disease of sin has infected us so completely that we are unable to turn to Jesus for help. And if it were left up to us, we would not just fail to overcome our sin, we would enter into the outer darkness of hell as punishment for our sin, where, as Jesus describes it in today's reading, "there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (verse 12) without end, eternal suffering.

But God the Father did not want to leave us in this state of complete and utter helplessness. He knew that we were unable to cure ourselves of the disease of sin, so he sent his only begotten Son, Jesus, to be our ultimate cure. Because Jesus is God, he was not born with sin, like all of us were, and he did not catch that deadly disease because he successfully resisted all the temptations that would have caused him to catch it, temptations that we fail to resist on a regular basis. Then, on the cross, he took the burden of our sin on himself and paid the price for all of it. Because of the suffering that Jesus endured on the cross for us, we have been cleansed of our sin.

The cure that Jesus won for you is a free gift that he gives to all of you through his Word and Sacraments. He speaks his forgiveness to you through his powerful Word, which heals you at that very moment. He reaches out his hand and gives you his healing touch through his Holy Sacraments. And now that he has given you his cure through these means of grace, you have a new life, not one that is weak and helpless, but one that is strong in Jesus.

Unfortunately, much like the physical sicknesses that you suffer through in this life, the disease of sin just doesn't want to go away. And it doesn't just give you physical weaknesses to suffer through, it also gives you spiritual weaknesses. It does so by trying to attack and weaken your faith, making you think that your weaknesses make you incurable. But, thanks to the new life that God has given you through faith, trying to power through on your own is no longer your only option. In faith, you can turn to God for help, and he gives you the help you need by giving you the comfort that he has forgiven you and will always be there for you, bearing the burdens that you suffer in this life until the day that you get to enter into eternal life in heaven with him and forever be at peace.

One of the ways that Jesus gives you the forgiveness of sins when you are suffering is through Holy Communion. In that holy supper, you come to the Lord's table, weak and helpless from the sins that you are suffering from, and you receive the Lord's true body and blood in the bread and wine, which is the best medicine there is, the medicine of immortality. This is not a medicine that tastes really nasty, like the medicine that you may have to take to recover from your physical sicknesses. This medicine is sweet, granting you the forgiveness of sins that Jesus won for you on the cross and strengthening you to continue through your lives with Jesus at your side.

Sickness is something that can be truly miserable and frustrating, especially when it makes us so weak and helpless that we can no longer function on our own. But even though it can be miserable, it can also be beneficial by helping us to realize that we can't do everything on our own and that we do need to rely on help from others, especially on Jesus. When we are suffering from physical or spiritual weaknesses and there is no one else to turn to, we know that we can always turn to Jesus, who has the power to help us get through any weakness, because he is God.

Even though things that cause us suffering, such as death, taxes, and sickness, are considered to be certainties in this life, they are only temporary. The only certainty that has no end is the grace and mercy that can only be found in Jesus. Jesus truly is the ultimate cure.

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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