

The Third Sunday after Epiphany
22 January, Anno Domini 2023
St. Matthew 8:1-13

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

Saints of God,

Behold what glorious things are revealed to you today! Jesus actually hears your prayers and shows to you that it is God's will to help you and restore you. It doesn't matter whether you are Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male or female, young or old, rich or poor. God wants you to ask Him with the same boldness and confidence as a child who marches up to his father and asks him for things that are insignificant and things of eternal consequence, secure in his father's love and confident that his father will help. Neither the leper's status as unclean nor the centurion's status as a Gentile stopped either one of them from going up to Jesus and urgently making their needs known to Him, fully expecting Him to do something.

That is pleasing to God. He doesn't view it as arrogant or presumptive. He rejoices in it and even marvels at it! Only faith could do such a thing. Only faith in God's promises could believe that the holy God would be willing to touch what is unclean to heal it. Only faith in God's promises would believe that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob would hear the cries of a non-Jew. But such boldness doesn't come out of the blue. These men had, at the very least, heard about Jesus. Maybe they had heard His preaching themselves. Maybe they had seen some of the miracles that Jesus performed in Galilee. Or maybe they had only heard of Jesus and His healing miracles from the mouths of others. Regardless, they believed what they heard. They believed that Jesus could and would help them. They believed that He was merciful, that He wouldn't be repulsed by their uncleanness. They asked because their confidence was in what they heard, not in what they were; it was in Jesus, not in themselves.

And that is the way it is supposed to be. Jesus did desire to help, to bring healing to all men. In the case of the leper who had been cast out of his town and out of the temple, Jesus had come precisely to restore him, not only to His people but to the presence of God. The God who desires mercy and not sacrifice reached out His perfect cleanliness and holiness to touch what was unclean and impure in order to make it clean and holy like Himself. In the case of the centurion, Jesus had come to

draw him and his servant to God so that with the leper they might give praise to God and receive not only the healing of their bodies but the forgiveness of their sins and everlasting life. That is what Jesus has come to do for all people, all nations, for all of you. He is moved to compassion by the sin that has reaped such terrible corruption in your flesh, in your mind, and in your soul. Rather than being repulsed by it, Jesus is drawn to it so that He can heal all that trouble and afflicts you.

It is this good news of Jesus who forgives sins and heals diseases, the good news of salvation, that gives both the reason and the confidence to pray. If we had not heard that the only Son of God had shown mercy, not only to this leper and this centurion and his servant, but that He had also taken all our uncleannesses, all our sin, and offered His life as a ransom for our sins, then we would have no reason to call upon God at all. We would have no reason to imagine that He would even hear us, let alone answer us and help us.

But you have heard. God sends His servants into your midst to tell you the good news of His desire to help you in every need. The good news of Jesus has been proclaimed to you. And in that proclamation, God Himself has invited you to rejoice in His mercy and call upon Him in every need. In Baptism God has sealed His promises to you. He has cleansed you of all your sin and said “You are my beloved child. I am well-pleased with you. Call upon Me in the day of trouble and I will answer you.” What further reason do you need? What further encouragement and assurance could God give than His Word confirmed by the Blood of His own Son?

All stand in need of His help. All suffer under the onerous weight of sin. Bodies suffer disease and decay. Friendships and marriages suffer divisions and harsh words. Jobs are suddenly lost. Anger and hopelessness bleed out into violence and rage. Torrential rains sweep away houses and even loved ones. No one is immune.

Yet, for all that, we are still hesitant to pray. We often think of crying out to God as a last resort, something only desperate people do if they can't fix it any other way by themselves. Or we pray as though we don't know whether God wants to help us. We've done nothing to deserve His help, to be sure. And quite often we are seeking help getting out of messes of our own making because, like children often do, we didn't listen to the warning of our heavenly Father and thought that sin wasn't bad or wouldn't hurt us. And now we suffer the consequence of our own arrogance and foolishness. Why would He help us? At times we imagine that our

concerns are too petty, too insignificant for God. Does He really want me to bother Him about a new car, my math test, or my head cold?

Repent and believe what you have heard again this day from and about Jesus. Do not doubt the work of the cross. Do not doubt the invitation of your Baptism. Do not doubt or dismiss God's own command to pray in the Second Commandment. Believe when Jesus Himself tells you "I do desire to help you. I have helped you and I will help you. I have saved you from death. I have forgiven your sin. I will help you in every trouble." There is absolutely nothing about you that your Lord doesn't care about - from what you're going to have for breakfast to the sickness that is coursing through your body to your fear of His wrath on the Last Day. All of it is important to Him. He is the source of every good thing that you need. And you have the seal of His own Blood to assure you that every need you have will be joyfully met according to the mercy of your Lord and Savior. Pray. It is the Lord's will to help you.

In the Name of +Jesus.

Pastor Ulmer

(We stand.) The peace of God which passes all human understanding keeps your hearts and your minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord.