

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

“The heavens proclaim his righteousness, and all the peoples see his glory. For you, O Lord, are most high over all the earth; you are exalted far above all gods.”

During this time after the Epiphany of our Lord, you see Jesus manifested or make known who he is as the Son of God. This was seen in his baptism when the heavens were opened, the Spirit descended upon him like a dove and the voice of the Father from heaven proclaimed, “This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased.” It was seen last week at the first sign done by Jesus when he changed water into wine at the wedding at Cana. He manifested his glory, and his disciples believed in him.

Creation groans and cries out for the day when all is made new. Man yearns for the day when sickness is no more, suffering is no more, persecution is no more, temptation is no more, sin is no more, the devil’s assaults are no more, and death is no more. That day is on the horizon, and it is coming. God’s people pray it comes sooner rather than later.

To be in this world until the Lord returns is to be where all those things which we long to end still are around us and assail us. Martin Luther in his hymn, “In the Very Midst of Life” speaks about all these things such as sin, death, God’s wrath, and the fires of hell surround us all in this life. The hymn then ends each stanza with, “Have mercy, O Lord!” That’s what we need. We need God’s mercy. We need him to do what only he can do for without the Lord and his work for us in Christ we are lost forever. All this he did as he has authority to do so. And that’s a theme through chapters 8 and 9 of Matthew’s Gospel.

The Gospel reading today shows you all these things in the vivid image of these two miracles worked by Jesus. Here, you see more of Jesus manifesting his glory as he cleansed a leper and healed a sick servant of the centurion. Jesus reveals himself to be the Lord who has come to heal and save, he has done it. Listen again to that first miracle recorded by St. Matthew, “When [Jesus] came down from the mountain, great crowds followed him. And behold, a leper came to him and knelt before him, saying, ‘Lord, if you will, you can make me clean.’ And Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, ‘I will; be clean.’ And immediately his leprosy was cleansed. And Jesus said to him, ‘See that you say nothing to anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a proof to them.’”

Jesus touched this leper and healed him. Touching the leper would have made Jesus unclean but he did so in order that the leper would be healed, and he was cleansed. See this mercy in Christ manifest. The Lord entered the world where leprosy and sorts of diseases and infirmities infect people and inflict all sorts of suffering and death. Creation, God’s creation, is attacked and testifies to its fallen state which is outside the bliss and life of Eden. What remains is this world around us and in the Gospel reading. Yet this is the world, the creation, Jesus entered when he took on human flesh only without sin. The eternal Word of God became flesh and dwelled among his people.

Redemption, being bought back from sin, death, and the devil is no walk in the park, Jesus knew this and went headlong into doing it. It’s dirty, unclean, messy, and comes at a cost. Seeing Jesus, though, work this miracle points you to him who does restore and recreate even as all things have been created by and through him. Every miracle of Jesus in the Gospels points to Jesus as the Son of God and it points you to that day when all sin, sickness, suffering, and death are no more. So, the question we ask is “what now?” That’s all well and good to hear these miracles but what does this all mean for us living in the here and now while sin clings to us and there are still sickness, suffering, and death among us?

Matthew goes on in the next miracle to teach you exactly what this all means, and it’s seen in an unlikely source, a centurion, a gentile. Listen again to what Jesus did and spoke. “When he [Jesus] entered Capernaum, a centurion came forward to him, appealing to him, “Lord, my servant is lying paralyzed at home, suffering terribly.” And he said to him, “I will come and heal him.” But the centurion replied, “Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof, but

only say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I too am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. And I say to one, ‘Go,’ and he goes, and to another, ‘Come,’ and he comes, and to my servant, ‘Do this,’ and he does it.” When Jesus heard this, he marveled and said to those who followed him, ‘Truly, I tell you, with no one in Israel have I found such faith.’”

The centurion comes to Jesus in humility asking Jesus to heal his servant. Jesus offers to go to his house but the centurion, knowing that Jesus would be unclean if he entered his house, knows that just at the word of Jesus his servant would be healed. He trusted God to act and act through his word. He doesn't make demands of Jesus. He looks to Jesus in humility trusting he will do what only he can do.

The centurion is quite the contrast from Naaman in the Old Testament reading. What did he do when Elisha told him to go wash in the Jordan? “But Naaman was angry and went away, saying, ‘Behold, I thought that he would surely come out to me and stand and call upon the name of the Lord his God, and wave his hand over the place and cure the leper. Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them and be clean?’ So he turned and went away in a rage.” Naaman's response was not humility rather it was pride. He wanted God to work on his terms and according to his way. That's different than the centurion who said, “Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof, but only say the word, and my servant will be healed.”

So, what is God teaching you in this? Well, listen further to the response of Jesus to the centurion. “When Jesus heard this, he marveled and said to those who followed him, ‘Truly, I tell you, with no one in Israel have I found such faith. I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ And to the centurion Jesus said, ‘Go; let it be done for you as you have believed.’ And the servant was healed at that very moment.”

Jesus marveled at the centurion, a gentile's faith. How well that fits in this Epiphany season! The centurion fixed his eyes on Jesus and trusted the Lord to work, believing his word. Great indeed was the faith of this man. This teaches you what your faith is to look like or rather to whom you are to look as you go through this world, this fallen creation. In the very midst of life in this world, you have Christ and his salvation. That forms your thinking, your actions, what you say, and even your whole life in this world. It's a tiring thing to look around you and see so many things such sickness, suffering, war, and rumors of war. Sin and the devil would have you look at those things, be anxious, be crippled in fear, and take your eyes off Christ and the future you have in him. God calls you to repentance and faith.

It's tempting as well to be like Naaman and try to define your life toward God in a way you think is right and good. Sin wants to put God in your life in ways that you can manage and are convenient. Your sinful man wants God to be this household god you can pull out of your back pocket when the going gets tough or when you want to try and rationalize your life as being justified because you are so busy, so much is going on, the illness is too great, or you just have your issues. A life not lived in faith toward Christ is a life that despises preaching and God's word. The opposite of living by faith in humility toward God and confidence in his word is a life lived in pride toward oneself and deaf to God. God, though, sees through all of that. Just as Jesus marveled at the faith of the centurion, he also marveled at the unbelief of the people in Mark 6.

In your life, you go through this world and are confronted with God and his work. As a Christian the Lord places his word before you and calls you to faithfulness. He calls you close your mouth and obey what he teaches casting aside your own understanding and look to his wisdom and counsel. And that's fine and all well and good until things go south. It's one thing to say you believe God's word and think you believe that God hears and answers your prayers and then it's another thing when the cancer spreads, when you get laid off at work, when your kids leave the faith, or when you look at your life and see just how many people you have hurt and sinned against in the just the course of a few days. It's far easier to be like Naaman and go to God but get angry when you don't get the response you were wanting and not like the centurion.

When you cry out to God and there appears to be no answer and no end to suffering then that's when the old man kicks in and starts formulating his own response to your life. He starts saying this like, "aren't the rivers in our own land far better than what God has commanded?" The devil and his lies start to creep into our hearts and like Adam and Eve we begin to start thinking, "Maybe God really didn't say." You turn God into an idol and force upon him your wants and desires. Your fallen will asserts itself and you pray, "my will be done."

To be a Christian is to hear the word of God and keep it. The marvelous thing about the centurion's faith that Jesus sees is the centurion knows exactly who he is and who the Lord is standing before him. The centurion's faith is great because Jesus, the object of his faith is great. That's an important thing for you too as you think about these things this morning. How great is your faith? In a sense, that's the wrong question to ask. The better question is "who is Jesus and what has he done?" A great faith never says, "my faith this" or "my faith that." A great faith instead looks outside of yourself in all times and circumstances and says, "Lord, have mercy upon me. Lord, I believe, help my unbelief. You are the Christ. Your will be done. You are my confidence. You are my righteousness. You are my hope. You are my salvation."

Your Lord, Jesus Christ, is here today and he comes with healing. He comes under the roof of this place as you have him in his word and sacraments. An ancient prayer before receiving the Lord's Supper uses language from this reading. "I shall receive the bread of heaven and call upon the name of the Lord. I am not worthy that you should come under my roof, but speak the word only and my soul shall be healed. May the body of our Lord Jesus Christ preserve my soul unto life everlasting. Amen."

There's something great for you to marvel at you behold Jesus this day. The Lord has reached out his hand and placed it upon you. He has taken your sin upon himself and forgives you by the shedding of his blood. You are washed clean in the waters God has appointed for you which are the waters of Holy Baptism. Marvel at Jesus who has done wondrous things for you and still does.

Like the centurion you are not worthy of anything the Lord has done or continues to do in your life, yet he is the Lord who has shown you mercy. He willingly comes to you through his means. In times of suffering, cross, and trial he is also with you and promises you that there will come the day when these things will end. You see these miracles as a glimpse, then, into your future when sin and all its wages come to end and there will be nothing but eternal joy. This is your hope as you see your Lord cleanse lepers and heal the servant of the centurion. This is the confidence you have as you go through life bearing the cross and saying, "The will of God is always best."

Jesus is God in flesh. Not only that but he cares for you, his creatures. He entered in this world and has redeemed you by his blood. He taken your iniquity and your infirmities onto himself as the anointed one and substitute to suffer God's wrath and pay the price you owe in your place. Jesus makes all things new even as you now are a new creation baptized into him. Your sin is forgiven and as you go through this world you go through it as one who has eternal cleansing, healing, and life. Though the times of trial and suffering may be great the Lord is greater still in giving you the victory over those things. You have eternal life in Christ and that means everything.

Jesus cleansed the leper and healed the centurion's servant. Jesus will raise your body from the grave on the last day and he will create a new heaven and a new earth free from sin, suffering, the assaults of the devil, and death. Fix your eyes on Christ and know what you have now and what awaits you. Cling to those promises that in your baptism God has washed away your sin, rescued you from death and the devil and given you eternal salvation. Cling to those words today spoken to you that your sin is forgiven. Feast at the Supper of the Lord taking into your mouth the true body and blood of Christ for the forgiveness of your sins and where there is the forgiveness of sins, there is life and salvations. Pray to the Lord without ceasing knowing the Lord hears and answers your prayers according to his good and gracious will. Look to that day come when you are raised, and you will be with the Lord and all of God's saints in that new creation forever.

3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday after the Epiphany—January 26, 2025

Your Lord Jesus is known this day, and he knows you. God marvels at you as you behold him in faith. The Father sees Jesus who has atoned for your sin. For his sake you are righteous in his sight. That means absolutely everything as you sit here now and go from this place. Your Lord calls you as his own and he guides you through this life through his word. Always set that before you and go to where he has promised to be. Confess your sin and crucify that old man who would have you have it your way and instead go to God's means of grace and find consolation and peace. Your Lord, Jesus, is made known, and he is the God of mercy toward you a sinner. You are not worthy that he should come under your roof, but he has come and is here because he has mercy on you. So, hear his word, take, and eat his body and blood. Cling to Christ who has done all things well. Marvel at him who is your Lord, Jesus Christ who looks at you now and says, "Go; let it be done for you as you have believed" and know the day is coming when you will stand before him face to face in a glory beyond compare. On that day, the eternal day when you are raised from your grave you will marvel at you Lord and all that is yours forever.

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