

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

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ and may our Lord and Savior sanctify you in the truth, for His word is truth. Amen

Twenty-First Sunday after Trinity (2021)

Jesus Heals Without Boundaries

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“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.” (John 4:49–50, ESV)

The Gospel Reading for today, Jesus healing the son of the royal official from Capernaum, ends the first major section of St. John’s Gospel. The account of this healing begins and ends with Jesus performing a **“sign,”** a **“sign”** pointing to His identity: the Christ who has come to heal and rescue God’s people from sin, death, and the devil. So, our focus this morning is not on the healing event of the official’s son whose sickness has him at the brink of death, but on the One who is doing the healing. That is Christ, who gave up His exalted and divine position in heaven and came to earth to be the great healer of all men, who came to heal mankind of their greatest sickness, the sickness of sin, that sickness for which man has no cure, that sickness which is always fatal, eternally fatal, unless eradicated by God’s gracious forgiving power which He gladly pours out upon the repentant sinner for the sake of His beloved Son, Jesus Christ.

As St. John describes this miraculous healing that Jesus achieved from Cana, healing the official’s son whose is lying in his sick bed in Capernaum some 16.5 miles away, let us ask the Holy Spirit to open the eyes of our heart to see the true miracle which occurs, not only in this account of our Lord’s healing of the royal official’s son, but in the divine, miraculous healings which take place every day. *Healings* that take place because our Lord Jesus removes the *Boundaries* between Himself and the person needing *Healing*.

St. John tells us that when a royal official in Capernaum, ***“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.” (John 4:47, ESV)*** Spurred on by stories of Jesus’ healings in Capernaum, this man wastes no time in making the 16.5-mile trip to Cana to see Jesus and plead for his son’s life. Now we know this man came to Jesus seeking help for his son, but did he really believe that Jesus could perform the cure that his son needed, or was his effort primarily driven by a faint hope based on the stories of great signs worked by this rabbi? Had he tried other cures, had his son been seen by Jewish doctors or other religious leaders? Scripture doesn’t tell us, but we do get a hint that this man’s faith was not fully in sync with his request, because Jesus responds to his request, saying, ***“Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe.” (John 4:48, ESV)***

Obviously, this official was a Jew, one who believed in signs. Signs were of great importance to the Jew. We remember ***“the Pharisees and Sadducees came [to Jesus], and to test him they asked him to show them a sign from heaven.” (Matthew 16:1, ESV)*** Show us a sign so we can authenticate who you are. But to them Jesus answers, ***“An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah.” (Matthew 16:4, ESV)*** We also recall that when John the Baptizer was in prison, he sent his disciples to ask Jesus; ***“Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?” (Luke 7:19, ESV)*** And Jesus answered them, saying, ***“Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them. And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.” (Luke 7:22–***

23, *ESV*) The Jews ask, give me a sign, give me some indication that You are who You claim to be. This was the typical attitude of the Jew. So, Jesus says to them, believe the signs, they testify to who I AM. Knowing this is the mindset of the Jew, should we be surprised when Jesus responds to the official's request, saying, ***"Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe"***? But unfazed by our Lord's response, this official, who is not yet a true believer in Jesus as the Messiah, clings to his flicker of hope that Jesus has the power to heal his son. Therefore, he responds, ***"Sir, come down before my child dies."*** (v. 49)

On bended knee, this official is begging for his son's life. On bended knee he is even more convinced now than before that this Jesus of Nazareth is the One who can save his son. Seeing this man's glimmer of faith, our Lord says to him, ***"Go; your son will live."***

Could sweeter words ever have been spoken to this man? ***"Go; your son will live."*** The sign Jesus gives this royal official is the healing of his son. The sign of giving life to the dying. The sign of his son passing from death to life. In these words of Jesus, the royal official hears Jesus say, ***"Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life."*** (*John 5:24, ESV*) As the royal official turns to go home, St. John tells us, ***"The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and went on his way."*** (v. 50) He believed Jesus. No doubts, no proofs, no signs, just faith. He believed. Jesus could heal his son no matter where he was. *Our Lord's healing power knows no boundaries, no obstacles.*

Therefore, rather than a healing story, this Gospel Reading is a testimony of faith. It is the testimony of a man who seeking healing for his son, gains healing for his own soul. It is the testimony of a man who is transformed from being dead in his sins and trespasses, to being alive in Christ.

St. John says this man ***"believed the word that Jesus spoke to him."*** Later he says that this royal official, ***"believed,"*** and so, too ***"all his household."*** (*John 4:53, ESV*) Faith beget faith. The royal official returns home and evangelizes his family with the truth of our Lord's identity. He is the One spoken of by Isaiah. ***"Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel."*** (*Isaiah 7:14, ESV*) He is the One of whom Micah said will be the ***"ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days."*** (*Micah 5:2, ESV*) He is the prophet spoken of by Moses (*Deut. 18:18*), and the offspring promised to Adam in the Garden of Eden (*Gen. 3:15*). This man who healed my son is the promised Messiah, He who is called Christ (*John 1:41; 4:25*).

Yes, he believed the word of Jesus and was brought to faith. This is how Scripture tells us that faith is given to all by God, through hearing the Word of Christ, the Gospel. Yet so many want to believe that faith is something they earn, something they can acquire by their own efforts. But Scripture denies such assertions. In his letter to the Romans, St. Paul writes, ***"How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!" But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?" So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ."*** (*Romans 10:14–17, ESV*)

Faith comes from hearing. The Word of the Gospel enters the ear and makes its way to the heart to affect its purpose: believing faith in Jesus Christ and His atoning sacrifice upon the Altar of the Cross. Faith is God's gracious gift through the Holy Spirit given by Him to whom He chooses. St. Paul makes this clear in his letter to the Ephesians, ***"For by grace you have been***

saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.” (Ephesians 2:8–9, ESV) Furthermore, in his letter to the Romans, St. Paul writes, *“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith.”” (Romans 1:16–17, ESV)*

Time and again Jesus alludes to faith as the one criterion by which man is saved, whether from some disabling disease or injury, or from sin, death, and the devil. Moreover, we are convinced by Scripture that the blessings and promises of God are received only by faith, which is the gracious gift of the Holy Spirit. For it was the Holy Spirit who brought us to Christ through the Gospel that we might believe. And without the Holy Spirit we are spiritually blind and dead, we are without trust and faith in Christ Jesus. Therefore, we confess with Martin Luther, *“I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith.”*

Hearing the word of Christ breaks down the barriers of pride and arrogance. His word eliminates the boundaries between Himself and you. When you hear the word of the Gospel, you hear Jesus saying, *“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, ESV)* In the words of this blessed invitation, your stone-hard heart is melted away and you are given a heart of flesh. You are given a heart that believes in Jesus and His atoning sacrifice for the forgiveness of your sins. You are given a heart with which to love your neighbor as Christ loves you. He says to you, *“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13:34–35, ESV)*

Yes, it is by God’s grace that we are given the gift of faith to believe in His Son’s sacrificial death for the forgiveness of our sins. By faith we are brought to the truth that Jesus is the Son of God and the Son of David, God and man simultaneously. Conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary without sin, that He could take our sin upon Himself and carry them to the cursed tree of the cross, there to suffer and die for our sins, paying the penalty for our sins, that we might be justified before God. Thus, it is faith that leads us to confess that Jesus is Lord. St. Paul put it this way, *“if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.” (Romans 10:9–10, ESV)*

Faith also leads us to confess our sins. Living lives led by the Holy Spirit, lives which seek to honor Christ and His heavenly Father, we are burdened by our sin. Therefore, with contrite and repentant hearts we seek absolution and confess our sins. As the royal official came seeking Jesus in Cana, we come to the house of God for Divine Service, seeking the cure that He alone can give, forgiveness of our sins. Thus, following the urging of the Psalmist David, who said, *“I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity . . . I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,” and you forgave the iniquity of my sin.” (Psalm 32:5, ESV)* we begin Divine Service with Confession and Absolution. We confess our sins and receive absolution from the pastor as from Christ Himself. Christ heals us from that which afflicts us. Cleansing us by His word. Cleansing us from that dreaded disease of sin which threatens our eternal soul. Thus, like the royal official’s son, we are healed, healed from afar and healed from within. We are *Healed because our Lord Jesus Christ has eliminated the Boundaries which separate us from Him.* In the name of Jesus. Amen.

May the Peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.