

Sermon Text for April 30, 2017

Genesis 15:1-6; Luke 17:11-19

“Your Faith Has Made You Well”

By Holly Miller

He is risen! This is the third Sunday in the season of Easter; we gather to continue the celebration of the victory of Christ.

Voice 1: She took her first-born son

Voice 2: Joseph took the body

Voice 1: and wrapped him

Voice 2: and wrapped it

Voice 1: in swaddling cloths

Voice 2: in clean linen cloth

Voice 1: and laid him

Voice 2: and laid it

Voice 1: in a manger.

Voice 2: in a new tomb hewn from the rock.

And Jesus said, “It is finished.”

The Son of God entered the world as a new-born baby laid in a manger, lived a life of obedience unto death, was killed on a cross and buried in a new tomb cut from a rock. He descended into hell and on the third day, he rose from the dead and ascended into heaven. God the Father raised His Son from the dead.

If you are like me, you long for a job that’s finished. Are the floors ever clean? Maybe for the one second before the dog re-enters from outside! Does the dust ever stop? Where does it come from, anyway? Wouldn’t it be grand if you didn’t have to refill the oil or gas tank, or even your own tank? Monday: a new week and the work begins all over again. But there is one job that is finished, completed, never needs to be done again: Christ’s work on the cross is

complete, total, finished. What has it accomplished? Our salvation – yours and mine. Think about that...your salvation is won, and not by anything you have done, but only by Christ's selfless, undignified dying. And Jesus said, "It is finished." It *is* finished – all accounts have been paid up – for your eternal life and mine. Praise be to God!

The work of Jesus to restore us to the Father was and is complete. This is the peace that Jesus gives to us, to the world. There is nothing we need to do to accomplish anything more. We need only to have faith, to believe that Jesus is the Son of God, as God Himself testified at Jesus' baptism and transfiguration. "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." According to 1 John, Chapter 4, believing that Jesus is the Christ consists of believing three things: that Jesus came in the flesh (4:2), that Jesus is God's Son (4:15) and that Jesus is the Savior of the world (4:14).

The disciple who witnessed Jesus' death on the cross – there was one – wrote in his letter, 1 John (5:4-5), "This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God." At the time of Jesus' birth, the Roman world was experiencing what is called the Pax Romana, or Roman peace, a time marked by external tranquility. But when the angels sang at Jesus' birth, they announced a deeper, more lasting peace, that of mind and soul. Every year on Christmas Eve here in this sanctuary, we listen and watch the children's Christmas pageant. Every year we see the young shepherds tremble with fear when the angels appear in our choir loft and proclaim, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy. For unto you is born this day in the City of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord." Jesus came in the flesh, he is God's Son and he is the Savior of the world.

How do we receive this lasting peace of mind and soul? In his letter to the Romans, Paul tells us that we receive this peace by faith in Christ: "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God" (Rom 5:1-2) which is to come.

Examples of faith exist throughout Scripture. One of the earliest is that of Abraham. God promised Abram that he would be the father of many nations (Gen 17:4) and changed his name from Abram (“exalted father”) to Abraham (“father of many”). “Abram (the “exalted father” who ironically was childless) believed the Lord and he credited it to him as righteousness” (Gen 15:6). Abram believed the Lord. We hear a similar statement in the New Testament in Luke when Mary is carrying Jesus in her womb and visits her cousin, Elizabeth, who tells her: “Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished!” (Luke 1:45). Mary believed the promise God made.

Abram’s faith that God would keep His promise – the promise that Abram would be the father of many nations – brought life over death into the lives of Abraham and Sarah. The promise that Abram believed was that God would bring back to life Sarah’s ability to have children. He believed this despite how hopeless it seemed from a human point of view. Humanly speaking, it was ridiculous! Sarah’s womb was dead; Abram’s body was essentially dead. Theologian Francis Schaeffer reminds us that “we were dead, just as dead as Sarah’s womb” and he asks, “Will we believe God? [as Abram believed God.] Will we believe that He raised Jesus from the dead? ... As soon as we believe this, we, who like Abraham and Sarah, have been dead [in sin], will have been made alive. Just as Sarah and Abraham could now produce a child, we now can begin to produce that which has meaning in life...As Sarah’s [dead] womb brought forth a child, so, when we believe the same God [the very same God] and His promises and therefore pass from death to life, we can begin to bring forth (on the basis of the finished work of Jesus Christ) that which is living instead of that which is dead.”¹

Paul describes the faith of Abraham in his letter to the Romans, Chapter 4: “Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed, and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, ‘So shall your offspring be.’ Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead – since he was about a hundred years old – and that Sarah’s womb was also dead. Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised” (4:18-21). Later, after Isaac was born and growing up, Abraham was told to sacrifice his son. Abraham’s faith that God would still, somehow, keep His promise

issued a living ram in the thicket instead of death to his son, Isaac. The ram became a substitute for Isaac as Christ was a substitute for us.

In the New Testament, those who had faith or “believed in” Jesus were healed. “Your faith has saved you; go in peace,” Jesus said to the sinful woman after she anointed his feet with precious perfume (Luke 7:35-50). In Luke 17, Jesus said to the one leper who returned, “Rise and go. Your faith has made you well” (Luke 17:11-19). To the woman who touched the hem of his garment and felt his healing power enter her, he said, “Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering.” (Mark 5:34). “Saved you,” “made you well,” “healed you” – all of these are attributed to faith.

Let’s listen to a meeting Jesus had with a group of society’s outcasts. It seems He is always doing that – meeting outcasts right where they are. Here, in Luke 17:11-19, Luke tells the tale of the ten lepers.

[Read Luke 17:11-19.]

This story of the ten lepers is found in none of the other gospels; only Luke describes this particular cleansing.² The story of the ten lepers *is* a story of healing, but it is also a story of faith and gratitude.

Ten men with leprosy, a contagious skin condition that left people deformed, met Jesus, “as he was going into a village.” According to Leviticus 13:45-46, lepers, those with lesions on their skin, were quarantined and were not permitted to enter the village. They stayed their distance, but called out to him. They called out, “Jesus, Master, have pity on us!” Obviously, they had heard of Jesus – perhaps even seen him traveling there before – and they knew him as Master. This is curious because nowhere else in Luke does anyone except a disciple of Jesus call Jesus “Master.” The title “master” would seem to indicate a recognition of his authority. “Have pity on us;” in some translations, “have mercy on us.” What did they want? Alms? Healing? They called Jesus by name and asked for help. They approached him with humility, the proper Old Testament way to approach God or one of his representatives for prayer.

Verse 14 says “when Jesus *saw* them,” so we know that Jesus had identified their condition as lepers. He saw them and saw that they stayed at a distance, outside the village. When he saw them, he commanded them, “Go, show yourselves to the priests.” What Jesus commanded the lepers to do was the normal procedure required by the Israelites after one was cured or healed. Let me say that again: what Jesus commanded the lepers to do was the normal procedure required *after* one was cured or healed. But Jesus had done nothing to heal them, it would seem. All ten obeyed, but when they started off, they started off with their leprosy intact. However, they did not go far before they were healed, for, “as they went,” they were cleansed, every last one of them.

“One of them, when he saw that he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked him.” It is only here in the entire New Testament that Jesus is thanked instead of God.³ The Samaritan is praising God in the form of Jesus. This Samaritan does not differentiate between Jesus and God. He humbles himself before Jesus and lays before him his gratitude. Jesus responds with questions: “Weren’t there ten of you? Where are the rest? No one came back to praise God for his healing except this foreigner (literally translated one of “another race”)?” Presumably, the other nine lepers were Jews. Yes, leprosy gave these ten men an unwanted bond of exclusion from others, but the Samaritan was doubly an outcast.

“Your faith has made you well,” Jesus said to the one leper who returned to offer his gratitude, the one leper who did not even belong to the other lepers by race. The other nine were cleansed from leprosy, along with this foreigner, but in addition to being cleansed, he was made well – “your faith has made you well.” The Greek word used here and consistently throughout healings in the New Testament is σωζω, which can be translated “to heal” or literally, “to save” or “free,” from disease or death. Some commentators believe Jesus’s statement, “your faith has made you well” could mean that this foreigner, this Samaritan, in addition to his cleansing from leprosy, received salvation, unlike the nine Jewish lepers. Not only was he obedient, as were the others, but he was grateful and praised God. Ten lepers were healed. All ten were healed, but only one of the ten returned to Jesus. Jesus told him to “get up and go on your way. Your faith has made you well.”

This healing/saving of a leper may bring to mind a healing that took place in the same region in the Old Testament. In 2 Kings the prophet Elisha encounters a leper named Naaman, commander of the army of King Aram of Syria. Elisha, like Jesus, does not provide immediate healing (he actually doesn't even speak to Naaman directly,) but through a messenger sends Naaman to wash in the Jordan River seven times. Commander Naaman, at first angry, then coaxed by his servants to obedience, does so and is healed. This foreigner, too, returns to Elisha with a thankful heart and declares, "Now I know that there is no God in all the world except in Israel" (2 Kings 5:15). Elisha tells the cleansed Naaman to "go in peace." We learn in both of these encounters that the kingdom of God is not limited to the Jews, but is open to all, foreigners or Gentiles included.

Our salvation is secured by Christ's completed work on the cross. Faith in Jesus is the victory that overcomes the world. God can and does quicken the dead. We respond to God and His promises with faith, which manifests itself in obedience and gratitude. We thank the Lord daily for His help, His comfort, His care and provision, His healing, but have you said "thank you" to God for saving you from death and restoring you to everlasting life and relationship with God through the blood of His Son, Jesus Christ? Have you said "thank you?" Gratitude is a manifestation of faith. Gratitude is what we shout when we believe that Jesus, the Son of God, died on the cross and rose again to be our Savior, when we believe "your faith has made you well."

¹Schaeffer, Francis A., *The Finished Work of Christ: The Truth of Romans 1-8*. (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 1998) p. 112-113.

² Robert H. Stein, *Luke* (vol. 24; The New American Commentary; Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 432-435.

³ Ibid.