

The Twenty-First Sunday after Trinity Sunday
St. John 4:46b-54
November 5th, 2017
Sts. Peter and Paul Ev. Lutheran Church
Greenville, SC
Pastor Jerald Dulas

Signs and Wonders

In Nomine Iesu!

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit before Sermon:

O Lord, send out Thy Light and Thy Truth, let them lead us. O Lord, open Thou my lips, that my mouth may show forth Thy praise. O Lord, graciously preserve me, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected. Amen.

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

The nobleman in today's Gospel is rebuked by our Lord + Jesus for his lack of faith. Our Lord says, "Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will by no means believe." The question that arises is, "Yes, but didn't the nobleman come to our Lord? Didn't his coming to Him show some sign of faith?" We see in this dilemma a further understanding about faith. We have been taught that faith in Christ saves. And, if we have faith as small as a mustard seed, this faith is sufficient. Well, how can this nobleman be rebuked for his faith if he has enough to come to our Lord. He at least believes that healing for his son is found in the Lord + Jesus.

There are other examples of our Lord + Jesus rebuking people's faith. In fact, one of those examples involves the Apostles themselves, who are rebuked by our Lord with the words, "O ye of little faith," when they are panicking on the Sea of Galilee from a storm while our Lord sleeps. Certainly the Apostles, who left all to follow the Lord have faith. And, we have read that the reason that they followed Him was because of Who He was. As St. Peter testified in St. Matthew 16, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." They believed He was the Messiah, the Anointed of God, Who was come to redeem the world from their sins. Yet, when they panic during a storm, the Lord rebukes them for their lack of faith.

So, what does this mean? Is this an error in Holy Scripture and our theology? That on the one hand we say, if you have faith like a mustard seed, you will be saved, but, on the other hand the Lord rebukes those with weak faith?

The answer is found in today's Gospel. We certainly see that the nobleman is rebuked for his weak faith by the Lord. His weak faith is shown by his demand of the Lord to come to his home to heal his son. The nobleman at least believes that if the Lord + Jesus would come to his home his son would be healed, so he believes that the Lord can heal his son. But this faith is incomplete. This faith relies upon "signs and wonders." This kind of faith can easily be stolen away by the assaults and crafts of the devil.

What does this teach us about faith, therefore? It teaches us that even though faith is the greatest treasure and gift—a gift that saves us for all eternity—it can be destroyed by the attacks of the devil. This should frighten us. Our faith can be taken away by the spiritual war that is waged upon us and all believers in Christ by the devil, the world, and even our own sinful flesh. What then are we to do? How

can we protect our faith from being taken away? The answer: our faith must ever be protected, nurtured, and strengthened. Ponder this: what treasure is more secure, the treasure that is in a paper sack, or a treasure that is locked in a safe? Obviously, it is the treasure that is locked in the safe. Well, how do we lock our faith up in a safe? This is done through constant use and participation in the means of grace, by which the Holy Ghost continues to create and strengthen and fortify our faith in the One, True Lord and Savior of mankind.

This is what St. Paul refers to in his Epistle to the Church at Ephesus. We must put on the full armor of God. We put on this armor whenever we utilize the Word and Sacraments. Daily we can put on the armor of God to fend against the devil, the world and our flesh when we rise and go to bed, by making the sign of the holy Cross and calling into remembrance our Holy Baptism. We can put on the armor of God daily when we confess our sins, and believe that for the sake of Christ, Who has clothed us with His righteousness in Holy Baptism, we are forgiven of our sins. We can daily put on the armor of God and strengthen our faith when we read and study the Word of God. When we come to this place of worship and hear preaching and receive the Lord's Supper, the Holy Ghost is placing upon us the armor of God; He is strengthening our faith; taking it out of a paper bag, and placing into a strong and secure safe, that will carry us into eternal life.

This is what we are talking about when we say that faith must increase, or that faith can increase. We are not talking about the level of salvation we receive. Or, like some reformed bodies believe, that with an increase of faith we can do greater "signs and wonders." This sort of faith is the kind that was rebuked by our Lord today in the Gospel. No, when Holy Scripture talks about our faith increasing it is talking about how well we can withstand the assaults of the devil.

Consider the nobleman from the Gospel today. He believed the Lord + Jesus could heal his son, but in his weak faith, he only believed our Lord could do it if He was present with his son. This kind of faith, that relies on "signs and wonders"; on great things happening to us a Christian, will be easily destroyed when temptation, sin, and eventually guilt is placed in our path. This kind of faith will be destroyed when it is challenged and shaken.

But our Lord + Jesus does not leave this man in this kind of faith. After rebuking the nobleman for his reliance upon "signs and wonders", Our Lord gives him something better to believe in—His Word. What word? "Go your way; your son lives." This is one of the best sermons of our Lord. Even though it is short (just six words) it proclaims everything that the Gospel embraces. It embodies the promises of God: rescue from the consequences of sin; rescue from death; rescue from the assaults of the devil. It carries the promise of life, and joy for the entire family of this nobleman.

We are told that the son was healed at the seventh hour. Seven is the number of completion. The son is completely healed at the seventh hour, and the faith of the nobleman is completely strengthened upon hearing of his son's healing. In fact, we are told his whole household believed with him. By the Word of the Lord, this nobleman received faith that would withstand the attacks of those who would seek to take it away. This nobleman's faith was locked up safe and secure in a safe, from those who would steal it from him, through the promise given to Him by our Lord.

This is why we come together for worship: to hear our Lord's Word and promises of forgiveness of sins, eternal life and salvation, so that our faith may be strengthened by the Holy Ghost and our faith may not be shaken or taken by the devil, but that our trust in the Lord might be sure and secure. Our faith increases whenever we hear the Gospel, so that when the devil comes to steal it, we may stand steadfast in the one, true faith. This battle was beautifully proclaimed in the Hymn of the Day: "Preserve us in Thy Word, O Lord, Subdue the Pope and Muslim horde, who, yet in vain, Thy Son disown, And seek to wrest Him from Thy throne. Lord, bring Thine enemies to naught, And let them in the net be caught That they have hidden to ensnare Thy Christians, who Thy truth declare. Then must our foes at

last confess That Thou Lord Jesus dost possess The pow'r to rescue and set free. Thy sheep, who trust in none but Thee. Amen." May the Lord by His Word daily strengthen and increase your faith, so that you might ever cling to Him and His promises, and might readily resist the devil, the world, and your own sinful nature's snares. In the Name of our Lord + Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit after Sermon:

Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy Name give glory! I will extol Thee, O Lord, and I will praise Thy Name forever and ever. Amen.

The Votum:

The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.