

It's a Simple Little Thing

Matthew 8:1-13

The Third Sunday after the Epiphany, January 27, 2019

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

It is a simple part of the Divine Service. It does not take long to do it. It is done and over with quickly and sometimes it happens so fast that some of you are uncertain what was said even though you really want to remember what was said.

It is the prayers for the sick.

Many of you offer such petitions. You offer them in your homes. You pray for healing. You pray on behalf of yourself when you are sick. You pray on behalf of others when they are sick. You either pray to Jesus directly on behalf of the one who is sick, or you pray to His Father in the name of Jesus on behalf of the one who is sick. Either way when you pray on behalf of the one who is sick or submit a request for prayer in Divine Service for one who is sick you do it because you have faith. You do it because you believe in Jesus. And you believe some remarkable things about Jesus.

First of all, you believe that Jesus can do it. You believe that Jesus can heal. You believe that Jesus can heal by miracles. Our Lord healed the leper by miracle. He simply touched the man and the man was healed. Our Lord healed the centurion's servant from a distance. He did not have to touch the centurion's servant. The Lord did not even get to see the centurion's servant. The Lord simply gave the word and the servant was healed. Both of these are miracles. The Lord does not have to touch someone in order to heal them. The Lord does not even have to be in their presence in order to heal them. He can be close at hand or far away. It does not matter. The Lord can heal because the Lord can perform miracles. When you pray you expect the Lord to heal. He could heal the person for whom you pray by miracle.

But even if the Lord does not heal by miracle you still seek the Lord for healing. In other words some of you pray for someone who is undergoing treatment. Some of you pray for someone who is in the hospital. Some of you pray for someone who is undergoing surgery. Some of you pray for someone who is taking medication or seeing a doctor. In each of these cases you are praying on behalf of someone who is engaged in non-miraculous treatments seeking healing for them. So even when natural treatments are sought, you are still praying to Jesus. And when the surgery, or treatment, or doctor's visit is successful and the person is healed you still give thanks to Jesus. You may thank the doctors and the nurses well enough. And I have heard many of you praise the doctors and the nurses for their service and then you go and thank Jesus also.

It is apparent from this practice on your part that you believe that Jesus healed the person for whom you prayed whether Jesus healed them by miracle or by non-miracle. In either case you acknowledge that Jesus is the maker of all.

Only the creator of all can fix His creation. The rest of us are too ignorant to fix the creation. Only the creator of all could make creatures in His own image. Those creatures whom He made in His own image therefore have the skills and techniques for learning about the creation. Only the creator could provide a consistent creation that works in a consistent fashion so that researches in the fields of biology and chemistry can rely on results that are usable over time. In other words the treatment that cures this person will likely cure the next one unless there is some reason that has not been taken into account and once the reason is taken into account then appropriate treatment may be prescribed. Because of all of this even when a person receives healing by taking their medicine, there you are in your prayers at home or requesting prayer in the Divine Service offering Jesus thanks.

It is apparent that you believe that Jesus is the source of all healing. It is apparent that you believe that He is the creator of all things. It is apparent that you believe that He came to restore His creation.

And that brings us to our next thing. When you offer prayers on behalf of the sick to Jesus not only do you confess that He can do these things, you also confess that He is willing to do these things.

God can seem implacable at times. There are times when it seems like your prayers are not heard at all. While God is almighty and all powerful and the creator of all things, that does not mean that He is willing to do everything that we would like Him to do. Believers throughout the ages have had to deal with this problem when it came to how God responded to their prayers. "How long will You listen to my groaning, O Lord?" and similar prayers have been prayed by God's people to God at times when it seemed that He was unwilling to answer.

If God were unwilling to answer all of the time eventually you would quit praying to Him. What would be the point of praying to someone who was unwilling to grant what you were asking of Him? If He is unwilling to grant what you are asking of Him, you don't bother to ask in the first place.

The fact that you bother to ask Him indicates that you not only believe that He can do what you are asking, but also that you believe that He is willing to do it.

In this case your prayers confess that Jesus is a merciful God. He is kind to His people and He wants what is best for them. Since He is the creator come to restore His creation, You pray to Him to restore the creation that He Himself wants to restore.

And that brings us to our next thing. If you believe that Jesus can heal the sick, then you believe that Jesus can raise the dead. If Jesus heals the sick, then Jesus is restoring a person who is broken in some fashion. In the case of the leper, his skin did not work the way that his skin should have worked. There was a rot in it. In the case of the servant of the Roman centurion, his servant was paralyzed. His servant did not operate the way that he should. He could not do anything as a result of his paralysis. When Jesus heals these people He is demonstrating His power to restore. But if you believe the creator is here to restore the creation, then by definition you believe that Jesus raises the dead. The resurrection of the dead is the ultimate restoration of the creation to the way the creation was meant to be. When Jesus raises the dead He is restoring functionality to them, just as He restores functionality to those who are sick.

You believe all of this or you wouldn't be praying to Him to start with.

This is also why you ask me to visit the sick.

I am not a doctor. I am not a nurse. I have no medical expertise or background. I know about medicine what any average layman knows about medicine. I don't know the fancy words. The knowledge and experience I do have I have accumulated over time by listening when I make sick visits. But that does not make me an expert. What applies to one person may not apply to another. One person's illness is not another person's illness. So I don't know much. And yet, you ask me to visit the sick.

Why? Well, first of all there is the biblical instruction in the book of James that you do so. In the book of James our Lord instructs us, "Is anyone among you sick? Let him call the elders of the church and let them pray over him anointing him with oil and the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to one another and pray for another that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous person has great power."

And as we observed last Sunday unless we follow that instruction of the Lord we will not know where the blessings of God come from, that is that they come from the Lord and His crucifixion. Therefore in order to keep the instruction of the Lord you must believe it. If the blessings of God come from the Lord and His crucifixion and those blessings include healing for ourselves or for others then it makes sense to call upon the representative of the Crucified to come and pray over the sick person and anoint them with oil indicating that the prayer has been said on their behalf.

And the book of James points out that the person being healed will also be forgiven indicates the connection between sin and sickness. Both sin and sickness are

dysfunction in the human being. The repair of one is the repair of the other. Jesus was not only healing the leper, He was also having mercy on the leper and restoring him to the assembly of God. The Lord was not only healing the centurion's servant, He was having mercy on the centurion's servant. Mercy includes forgiveness. If that is the case then it makes sense to call upon the one who administers God's forgiveness to go to the hospital or wherever the sick person is and to pray for their healing.

And even the modernists know that people get better faster when their pastor comes to heal them. That is why Carle offers me and all clergy free parking in their parking garage. Even the unbelievers can see this, how much more you who request that the pastor come and you who pray on behalf of the sick whether yourself or others and you who request prayer from the congregation in the Divine Service.

You do this simple little thing. You do it because you believe. You have faith in Jesus. And faith saves.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.