

The Purifying Word of Peace

We all know the account of the Roman centurion coming to Jesus, seeking healing for his dying servant. *“You don’t need to come with Me Jesus. You’re a busy man. I get it. I’m a Roman. You’re a Jew. I get it. Just say the Word. I’m a man of authority. I say the word, and it is immediately obeyed. Just speak the Word; exercise your divine authority, and it will be so.”* And the rest is history. So...a good question for us to ponder (since we already know this text so well): ***What exactly healed the centurion’s servant?*** Well...I can tell you what didn’t heal the guy: Faith.

That’s crazy! How can I say such a thing? Easy. Look at the texts before your eyes. Naaman didn’t even have faith when he was healed, did he? *“The rivers in Syria are far cleaner and purer than this dirty, muddy glorified pasture creek!”* ***That’s not faith; not at all.*** Even in the case of the Roman centurion, his faith didn’t work the healing. Contrary to popular opinion; maybe even contrary to your own opinion, faith does **NOT** have any sort of magical power. Faith is simply another word for “trust.” Picture faith like a grasp or a hug. It’s not the trust that has the power to move mountains. It’s not the trust that raises the dead or heals the sick. Rather, it’s the object/person that the trust holds fast to that has the power/ability to do these great and mighty and miraculous things. **God** moves mountains. **God** raises the dead. **God** makes lepers clean and sick people well again.

Look again at the accounts of Naaman, the leper that comes to Jesus, and the Roman centurion. ***The common denominator in all of these miraculous healings is the Word and Promise of God.*** Naaman’s servant says to him when he’s voicing his doubt about the effectiveness of something so silly as washing in the muddy old Jordan River, *“Did not this prophet—this man of God—say to you, ‘wash and you will be clean?’”* Basically, *“You heard the Word. Trust in his Word.”* The leper that comes to Jesus? *“Be clean,”* and immediately he was. It wasn’t the physical touch that healed the man, as if Jesus had some sort of ***“reverse Midas touch”*** and everyone who even brushed up against Him was instantly made clean and blemish-free. It was the Word of Christ that worked the instantaneous and total healing of the man; the same Word that created the heavens and the earth out of nothingness; the same Word that would become flesh and dwell among us.

As for the centurion, it’s plain as day. *“Only say the Word and I know that my servant will be healed.”* This man then goes on to explain how he fully understands and trusts in this almighty Word of Christ. *“I’m a man of authority. I understand the power of the word. I say ‘go’ and people obey. They go. I say ‘come’ or ‘do this,’ and it happens. I know the power and efficacy of the spoken*

word. *I am not worthy to have You, Jesus, even step foot in my house. I'm nothing. Simply say Your almighty Word, and I know that it will happen. I know the almighty authority that Your Godly Word possesses. I know what Your Word is able to do.*"

And I'm sure at this point that I'm preaching to the choir, right? We all know all this already. *Yeah...but do we believe it? Do we trust this Word?* I know everyone here will profess to trust in the almighty and all-powerful Word of God. We look in the mirror, and we certainly like to think that we see the Roman centurion staring back at us—a person of *strong, commendable faith* in God's Word. And yet...our reality, if you're bold to confess, is sometimes much more *leprous and ugly*.

The ugly Truth is that we don't trust the Word of God; *not always and not fully*. In fact, we're often very piece-meal and buffet-style in our trust. We proudly proclaim trust in God...when things are working in our favor, but when things aren't going the way we plan or the way we think they should go, we show our sinful rear-ends and we reveal our doubt and lack of trust in God above all things. I say all this only because you will leave here in a few minutes and enter into the world; a world full of sin and doubt; a world that doesn't trust in God above all things; a world that despises God and His loving control. *And make no mistakes: We're part of this world*. We're in the world, and often—*regrettably*—also very much of the world (which Jesus prayed would not be the case; ref. John 17). We may not want to admit it, but the faith that is so easily professed in here is often *checked at the door and left in the pew* as the focus gets put on “more important” things like bills and bank balances and Facebook and what we're gonna have for lunch all kinds of things that have **NOTHING** to do with salvation or the mission of the Church (baptizing and teaching to obey all that Christ has said—again, note the emphasis on Christ's Word). We don't *always* trust that God's in control. We don't *always* trust that God is working all things for the good of those who love Him.

But rather than harp on our sinful unbelief; rather than kick the corpse for being dead, I will direct you to the Lord and Giver of Life; *the One who has the authority and the will to give life to such death*. Look to His cross. Look to His font. Look to His altar and His rail. Look and listen. *“It is finished, once and for all. Take and eat; take and drink, this is My body and My blood, given to you for the complete forgiveness of all your sins. Hear My Word of absolution. Your sins are completely forgiven and remembered no more. They have been drowned and washed over in My blood. I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”*

Here is the sure and certain comfort and peace that nothing else and no one else can give. *They simply don't have the power. They don't have the authority.*

Here is the sure and certain comfort and peace of Christ, and it can only be known and understood *in and through faith*. Understand: Our faith doesn't work/give peace. Our faith didn't die on the cross for our sins. But...through the God-given gift of faith, we hold fast to the One who does give us peace; His peace, which surpasses all human understanding.

I pray that this [Word and Sacrament; the peace of Christ] actually means something to you; that it's not just lip-service or an act. Dear baptized children of God: Be at peace, ever and always. The Word of the Lord is all-sufficient. The Word of the Lord works. It accomplishes exactly what He purposes, and it never returns to Him void or empty. For better, for worse, richer or poorer, in sickness and in health, in favorable election years and in not-so-favorable election years, in good economies as well as in recessions and depressions and shut-downs, in war and in peace—*through it all—God is the Authority, and the Author is in complete control*, always with us, loving us, protecting us, and nurturing us—**ALWAYS**. Hold fast to His peace, for God *has never and will never* forsake you. You belong to Him. It is finished. Nothing and no one can snatch that away. As one of my favorite seminary professors used to say, “*We have our Lord's promise (notice—the emphasis on the Word of Christ) that the gates of hell will never prevail, so neither will _____.*” Be at peace, and hold fast to Christ, from whence your peace comes; *the peace WHO is with you now and always, to the very end of the age.*

May this Word—His almighty Word; the same Word that washed you clean in the waters of Holy Baptism—fill your hearts, your minds, and your souls with peace and joy and thanksgiving. *May your cup runneth over!* And may this same peace of God, which does surpass all human understanding, and which is known only in true saving faith, guard and keep your hearts and minds in Christ, and may it be witnessed in you and through you, now and into all eternity.

In His name...**AMEN**