

Pentecost 4B – Proper 8 (6/28/09 – Christ – Our Great Physician & Savior)

In the Name JESUS. [Amen]

Affliction and grief, an earnest request by the Apostle for relief for fellow Christians dying from famine, an older woman suffering from a discharge of blood touching the hem of Christ's garment, a sick little girl at the point of death ... her father passionately pleading with Christ to heal his beloved daughter. They say death is the great leveler. Young and old, rich and poor, famous pop star and nameless transient ... and everyone in between – will eventually come under the sword of the dreaded angel of death.

But even before that, there is the first great leveler – sin. Before death entered, there was sin. In fact, that sin was the cause of death. ***In the day you eat of it, you shall surely die*** [GEN 2.17]. In the day that you sin by breaking the one and only commandment the Lord God has given you, death will enter your body – the whole creation – and your spirit shall die within you ... and you shall most surely be dead before God.

Actually, **sin** is the great leveler. Some will still be alive when the Lord Jesus returns and will not see death – and even Enoch and Elijah were taken into heaven without tasting death. But **all** have been sinners – plagued with the sinful flesh from the moment of conception ... plagued with the disease of sin ... and as a result on the path that leads toward death from the very instant that they received life.

We should not wonder, then, that that unnamed woman with the flow of blood, Jairus' daughter, and even the Apostle St. Paul suffered various afflictions – even to the point of death. We should not wonder, then, when **we** suffer from various illnesses, diseases, aches and pains, and the decay of our bodies. We should not wonder because we are **all** sinners – and sin means corruption, disease, destruction, and eventually death.

We see it all around us. Sometimes it is distant – Baghdad, Afghanistan. Sometimes it is closer to home. And sometimes it comes too close – a co-worker, a friend, a neighbor, a family member, our beloved ... ourselves.

The first thing that we need to do is recognize that just because we are believers, does **not** mean that we are exempt. If the greatest believer there ever was suffered death, why should we think we are any different? I am talking about Christ, of course. According to His humanity, He was the greatest believer – He succeeded in following God's commands where Adam (and Eve ... and everyone since) failed. Even as He was suffering His most cruel, unjust death by crucifixion, He prayed to God the Father ... and when His last breath was coming,

He commended His Spirit into His Father's gracious hands. But Christ died, nonetheless – though He was **sinless**. We should not expect anything different – anything better. And anyone who claims that believers **should** expect better – not to suffer ... not to be sick – in this life are charlatans and false preachers.

St. Paul wasn't perfect – he knew he was the chief of sinners [1TIM 1.15] ... do you know that **you** are? Knowing our own sins – their extent and depth – each of us should think we are chief of sinners (even if we look better on the outside). But it can hardly be claimed that the Apostle had a shortage of faith. Why did God not heal him when he prayed so fervently those three times? (Actually, we'll hear about Paul's "thorn in the flesh" next week ... but it fits so well here.) The Lord responded to his prayers: ***My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness.*** And St. Paul concludes: ***Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.*** [2COR 12.9] And in this week's *Epistle*, we hear about the *severe test of affliction* of many saints – believers – in Jerusalem (and elsewhere, I suppose) whom the Macedonians had helped generously and for whom Paul was encouraging the Corinthians [2COR 8.1-9] to give freely.

This side of heaven, even we believers are plagued with sin, afflictions, sickness, death. So what are we to do? What is the antidote ... the solution? You know very well – but your flesh is oh, so weak. ***Christ is our Great Physician and Savior!*** He alone can cure what ails us – both physically and spiritually. We see this at work in our Holy Scriptures for the day. Even in the midst of his lament over evil and the sad state of the children of Israel – the chosen people of God – the prophet Jeremiah sees and knows and proclaims the steadfast love and salvation of the Lord. ***The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; His mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness.*** [LAM 3.22-23] Then Jeremiah remarks about how good it is to ***wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD*** [3.26]. ***For the Lord will not cast off forever, but, though He cause grief, He will have compassion according to the abundance of His steadfast love' for He does not willingly afflict or grieve the children of men.*** [3.32-33] What is the purpose of the affliction and grieving, then? **Not** necessarily an indication of the displeasure of God – but, indeed, just the opposite ... of His desire to grow His children in the faith and work in them to move them ever closer to Himself. The Lord afflicts and grieves as a measure of disciplining us – as dear children by our dear, heavenly Father. As the Lord says in HEBREWS: ***And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by Him. For the Lord disciplines the one He loves, and chastises every son whom He receives."*** [HEB 12.5-6] And the purpose of such discipline and chastisement is

actually our good and the glory of God ... as Peter (one of the witnesses to Jesus' healing of Jairus' daughter) wrote much later: ***Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.*** [1PEET 1.3-7]

Consider how all these in our *Holy Scripture Lessons* for this day are driven to God and His Christ by means of their afflictions. Jeremiah sees and knows the affliction of the children of Israel – dispersed on account of their own sin and rebellion, to be sure ... but now penitently seeking the Lord. Jeremiah desires the rebuilding of Jerusalem – especially the Temple of the Lord ... where God was present in His mercy to save. He cries out to God in prayer – and is made to see the steadfast love and mercy of God ... and to recognize the virtue of patiently waiting for the salvation of God.

Paul knows of the affliction of the brethren in Jerusalem – famine and tough times often hit bigger cities more severely – and his eyes are turned toward ***the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake ... became poor, so that you by His poverty might become rich*** [2COR 8.9]. And this is not material richness that he is talking about but spiritual, eternal wealth – the blessings of forgiveness, life, and salvation already in this life ... and continuing into the everlasting blessings of heaven in the face-to-face presence of our Lord.

A woman suffering for twelve years – ***under many physicians***, our text says ... none able to help and cure – comes to Jesus, believing, ***If I touch even His garments, I will be made well*** [MK 5.28], and is healed by the power of God. Her ***faith has made her well*** ... and she goes in peace, healed of her disease [5.34].

A powerful man – a ruler of the synagogue – comes to Jesus, desperate. His beloved little daughter ***is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well and live.*** [5.22-23] No one else can help ... only God ... only ***Christ – Our Great Physician & Savior***. For a time the help of the Lord seems delayed. Indeed, all seems lost. ***Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the Teacher any further?*** But then comes Christ's: ***Do not fear, only believe.*** [5.35, 36] Even death cannot stop the power of God's steadfast love, mercy, faithfulness, and life. The world may scorn you for such faith. But with the Lord's

Talitha, cumi ... Little girl, I say to you, arise – with His Word – comes His power and kingdom and Spirit to restore life.

You were dead in your trespasses and sins – beyond hopelessness from a worldly perspective. Again and again you keep falling into sin. But know that ***the Lord will not cast off forever ... He will have compassion according to the abundance of His steadfast love ... wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD ...*** and you will soon hear His ***cumi*** – arise – spoken to you. ***Christ – Our Great Physician & Savior*** heals your sin and gives you His saving life ... that lead to everlasting life.

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. [Amen]