

The Twenty-First Sunday after Trinity, A^xD 2010

John 4:46-54

In the name of the Father and of the ^x Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

1 How is your prayer life? How well do you use the name of God? Is it a byword on your lips, only used to curse when something goes wrong? Do you call upon it in every trouble? Do you pray, praise, and give thanks in every blessing? Or are you more like the nobleman with a dying son?

2 When the nobleman had a problem—admittedly a big problem—he came to Jesus. He had heard about Jesus from His last time in Cana. That time He was there as a guest at a wedding. Nothing seemed out of the ordinary until they ran out of wine. Then the mother of Jesus petitioned her son to fix the problem. He dealt her a mild rebuke: “Woman, what does this have to do with me; my time has not yet come.” But then He fixed the problem, providing hundreds of gallons of the finest wine the guests had tasted. So now when He returned to Cana, the crowds were interested. They remembered.

3 “The miracle worker, the one who gave us wine from the stone water jars, the one who does great signs and wonders, He has come back to Cana!” So the official from Capernaum made the 20 mile journey to Cana to see if he might get this Jesus to do a miracle for his dying son. He believes Jesus can do miracles, to be sure, or at least he hopes so. But Jesus is for this official as any other servant, a means to an end. When he has a need, Jesus is convenient. So he came and asked Jesus to come to his house to heal his son.

4 What kind of prayers are those? You have a need, and Jesus seems like a convenient solution. Is that how you treat Jesus, as well? As a miracle worker to be ordered around when you have need of Him and allowed to go His own way when you see no pressing need? Do you call on him only when you have an illness, a family crisis, an errand you could use some help with? Is Jesus just a means to an end, little more than a genie to be invoked with half-hearted prayers? Believing Jesus is a miracle worker will do you no good; that is not faith. Even the demons believe that and shudder. Repent.

5 Again, as at the first sign He performed in Cana, Jesus rebuked the petitioner for short-sighted hopes and infantile faith. “Unless you see signs and wonders, you will not believe.” But faith is not what can be seen or proved. No, faith is, according to the writer of Hebrews, the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. Even if the official could have signs and wonders, he still would not believe. How many people witnessed the miracles of Jesus and still remained obstinately without faith? In fact, the signs and wonders Jesus performed were what drove the crowds to conspire to have Him crucified. But the official persisted, refusing to let Jesus have the final word. Where before St. John records the man asked Jesus to come to his house, now he’s done asking. “Come down [to my house] before my child dies.” But Jesus will not. He will not be ordered around, no matter how much power or influence this official supposes to have. He speaks just a word to him. Go; your son lives.

6 Just a word. That’s all the nobleman got from Jesus. He could not see his prayers answered. He had no proof that his son’s life was restored. All he had was a word from Jesus. And yet he departed with only this word in his pocket. He came impetuously, with a weak, simple faith. He came thinking he could order Jesus around, bend God to his will, get what he wanted just by asking. He came in unbelief and left in faith. The word of Jesus evoked repentance and faith in this hard-hearted man. The word that made wine from water now makes life from death, a town miles away and also tight here in Cana. The son of the man was brought from death to live having received his health from the very moment of Jesus’ word. The man was likewise brought from death to life, having believed and so made believers out of his entire household. With just a word.

7 Just a word, but what a Word. The word of Jesus is the word that cleaves darkness from light. The Word of God is the word with the power to create something from nothing, with the power to create the entire world in six ordinary days. It is the eternal Word. In the beginning was the Word. The Word was God, and the Word was with God. By Him all things were created. And then the Word became flesh and dwelled on earth. Jesus is the Word of God, the eternal Second Person of the Holy Trinity. What a Word! The same word that pronounced "let there be light" commanded the dying boy to live.

8 What a Word. The Word of God, enfleshed in full humanity, is all you get. Just a word, just the Word. The Word was born to die, to be nailed to the cross. There, the Word that created the heavens and earth, the Word that spoke light into existence, the Word that raised the dead, died. Just a Word. The eternal Word of God, Jesus Christ, is the only hope for sinful, dying humanity, for people like us. Just the Incarnate Word, just Christ: what a word!

9 Just a word: the Christian lives with just a word. "It is truly strong faith, that a heart can believe what it does not see and understand, contrary to all the senses and reason, and can cling only to God's Word" (Luther). Faith comes by hearing. Just a word. Forgiveness and eternal adoption come in the water of Baptism joined with the words and promises of God. What a word. Jesus has sent men to speak His word to you. Just a word, but what a word: Holy Absolution. And with just a word, He who created everything that exists creates the true presence of His own flesh and blood on the altar for you to eat and drink for the forgiveness of sins.

10 Faith lives and grows in the Word. Like Jesus brought the nobleman from his feeble faith and faithless prayer life to a confident faith that trusted the Word of Christ and departed to see his healed son, even without any evidence, He does the same for you. His Word matures you, changes you from the milk-only diet of new believers into the mature faith that trusts the simple word of Christ. This faith, fed, strengthened, and grown in the Word, is strong enough to weather adversities and trials. This faith has a perfect prayer life, living in Jesus, clinging to Him, calling upon Him in every trouble, praying, praising, and giving thanks in all times of blessing. It trusts the Incarnate Word, Jesus, knowing that even in adverse times, He has your best interests in mind. It is a faith content to live in the Word of God, faith that clings to Christ, the Word of God. So Jesus sends you forth with His Word in your pocket, in your heart, on your lips. Just a word, but what a word, indeed.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria

Pastor Jeff Hemmer