

“Sickly People”

Matthew 9:9-13

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Every one of us has been there one time or another. You're just not feeling your best. Whether that's a cough, a runny nose, a headache, or any other of the annoying maladies that always show up at the most inconvenient times, you can't seem to shake it off because sometimes sickness just gets the best of you. And what do you do when you start feeling under the weather? You seek out someone who can help you with it, and for the worst times, you need a physician. Because that is why God gave them the gifts they have. He provides for people when they are sick, in order to give them healing medicine and help them feel better in their bodies. But what is really at play in these maladies of the flesh? Is it just happenstance that you find yourself sick from time to time, or is there another reason for such things?

Jesus tells the Pharisees in our text this morning, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.” When you are sick, you need a physician's help, and when you are well you have no more need of their healing. This analogy from the Lord is clearly one that is directed to the soul, and is true to what Jesus says also in Luke 19:10, “For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.” The maladies of the soul are desperately in need of a physician, more specifically the Great Physician who has come in the flesh for just that reason. All of mankind is made up of sickly people in need of healing, because all bear the sinful flesh of Adam. So, when Jesus tells the Pharisees that “those who are well have no need of a physician,” He is pointing to the truth that no one is well. All of us are sickly people in need of a Physician—a Savior—to pull us out of the sickness of the soul that leads to eternal death.

Because without Jesus coming into the world to die the death which all man deserves, that's exactly where everyone would end up. The flesh is a sick, diseased, and cancerous scourge on mankind, and that is a truth that will be borne by all of us until the day Jesus returns to make all things new. As Paul says in Romans 5:12, we are all condemned through Adam, “For just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned.” It was Adam's sin that brought us to this sinful state. By giving into the temptation of Satan through the woman God had given to him, he brought imperfection, sin, sickness, and ultimately death to all people. But make no mistake, as Paul said, “death spread to all men because all sinned.” No one gets a free pass. No one gets the ability to just look the other way and say, “It wasn't me.”

All mankind has sinned, because all of us bear the sinful flesh which can do nothing else. Our very wills are set against God, and leave us utterly incapable of anything good on our own. If we were anything other than completely depraved, there would be no need for the suffering and death of Jesus. And while we suffer from this ailment of body and soul, that sickness continues to spread as our sin abounds all the more. No matter how hard we might try, we just...can't...stop...sinning. Left to our own devices we find ourselves in a state of pride, believing that we have the power within ourselves to overcome the sickness that pervades our lives. But sin is not a cold that you just have to "grin and bear it" until it passes. It is not something that we are to give power over us. The prophet Isaiah tells us why in 59:2, "but your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden His face from you so that He does not hear."

God cannot tolerate unrighteousness, and thus He cannot and does not tolerate sin. What does that mean for the Christian as they battle the scourge of the sinful flesh every single day? What does it mean for you that you have no ability to overcome that which separates you from your God? How do you overcome sin in your life so that you don't find yourself an unbeliever from whom God has hidden His face? You seek out the One who has the medicine to cure your disease. A cancer patient wouldn't go to a theme park to find the answer to the disease that is trying to kill them. They would go to the doctor who specializes in cancer and has the medicine they need to battle it. The answer to your sin problem does not lie in self-help books, licensed therapists, or taking a break from everyday life. The answer to the world's sin problem is the same for everyone. The answer is Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. He is the Physician that has the medicine you need to fight the battle against sin on a daily basis.

The Holy Spirit works faith in your heart, and thus gives you the means by which you take up the battle against your sinful flesh. As Jesus says in John 6:63, "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all." Cancer cannot battle cancer, and sin cannot battle sin. A doctor would never introduce more cancer in the hope that it will destroy the other one. The answer to the sinful flesh does not lie in the flesh, because more sin can never be the answer to bringing less sin. The answer lies in what the Spirit brings. He brings forgiveness, life, and salvation through His Means of Grace. Through the Word of truth, written down for the edification of all generations by the Prophets, Apostles, and Evangelists, is the source of hope and the power of God for salvation (Rom. 1:16). You don't have to wonder about how God will cure your wearied soul. He has told you Himself how He has already done it.

In sending His only begotten Son into the flesh, “He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By His wounds you have been healed (1 Pet. 2:24). That is the joyous proclamation of the Gospel. Jesus has given His own flesh and blood for the salvation of yours. You are no longer condemned for the sins of your flesh, and the ailment of sin within you no longer has power over your life. Not because of your own power or will, but despite your lack of power and will. In the waters of Baptism, God gave you His Holy Spirit to dwell within you, and by His power you have the capability of overcoming sin. The Spirit overcomes it for you by His indwelling, according to the righteousness of Christ which is yours by baptism into His death. And so, you are called to remember that Baptism every day, because “it works forgiveness of sins, rescues from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this, as the words and promises of God declare (Luther’s Small Catechism).”

You have been made new in those waters, and as a new man who now lives according to the Spirit and not according to the flesh, you avail yourselves of the things of the Spirit. You avail yourselves of the life-giving medicine that will keep the sinful flesh at bay, and that life-giving medicine is found in His Word, in Baptism, and in the Sacrament of the Altar. When you receive His very body and blood in your mouths for the forgiveness of your sins, the sinful flesh writhes in agony. It knows its destruction is coming, and every reminder of it makes it want to pull you away. And yet, by the work of the Spirit, you stay. You stay at His altar where He promises life and salvation will flow from the words, “given and shed for you for the forgiveness of your sins.” There can be no greater medicine in all the world than to receive His pardon and peace in the Sacrament of His body and blood. Here in these seemingly simple elements, you find the peace of the Lord which He has promised to give through the gift of His precious Son.

Throughout the world there is sickness, disease, death, and destruction that is in need of a physician to help cure it. But that physician is not found among the people who dwell here. He is not a simple man that needs to step up and do the job of curing the ailments of the world. The One who will cure the world and purify all things, is the Great Physician, Jesus Christ. He has made you righteous in His sight by the washing of regeneration that you received in the waters of Holy Baptism. He has forgiven your sins in the proclamation of His Gospel absolution, and in the sharing of His very body and blood in His Holy Supper. The medicine of immortality has been given to you by the only One who has the power to remove the stain of sin and the diseased flesh that you bear in this life. By His grace and His grace alone, you are able to stand before His Father in heaven as one who has been made perfect—healed of every malady of the soul.

You were not righteous until He declared you to be so, and that righteousness is yours because He sent His only Son to die the death you deserve and shed His blood for the forgiveness of your sins. You were sickly people, and that is why the Physician was sent. There is no other reason that Jesus came into the world except for the purpose of your salvation. He came not for the righteous, but the sick, and that is all that dwells in the world. Everyone is sick, in need of the Savior's medicine of immortality, and He brings that to His people in the blessing of Word and Sacraments. For He desires mercy, and not sacrifice, and that is true because He has already given the perfect sacrifice which brings His mercy to all people. He has imparted His righteousness to you, and so, you will stand before the righteous judge and be declared holy for Jesus' sake alone. He has done all that is necessary to heal you, and that healing gives you everlasting life in His holy presence, to dwell in joy and peace for all eternity. Amen.