

Sermon for Trinity 21 – John 4:46-54

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

“... Jesus said ...’Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe.’” The Lord gives a seemingly unmerciful response to the official whose son was ill. The man’s request was for Christ to come down and heal his son who was at the point of death. The man demanded a sign, a wonderful miracle conducted on his terms.

In a way, the official is not unlike the scribes and Pharisees: “Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you,” they said to the Lord. But even they are not alone in this request: Don’t we also imagine that if we could see some dramatic intervention of God, it wouldn’t be so difficult to trust in Him? Most of the time, we don’t think of God, except when we’re in trouble. That’s when we “believe” in God. How generous we are to give God an opportunity to prove that He actually exists! How considerate of us to open our reasonable and rational minds just a little bit to allow God to help us out, just this once!

Even Jesus’ enemies conceded that He did signs that were beyond anything that they had ever seen or heard. But it’s worth noting that Christ never worked miracles to impress people. Jesus never performed signs to make Himself popular. The Lord never once did wonders in order to be believed. To do this would be to succumb to the temptations of the devil – all of which Christ resisted. So if not for these reasons, why did Christ perform miracles? He worked wonders to reveal God’s merciful presence. For those who had eyes to see, His miracles revealed that the kingdom of God was at hand and that the Messiah had come.

In some instances, the Lord would not perform miracles. The Scriptures record times when Christ would do no signs, much the way it seems today. On one of these occasions, He answered the request for a miracle by offering nothing else than the sign of Jonah. Jonah. We know that story well...the unwilling prophet who was swallowed by a fish and remained there 3 days until being vomited out on dry land. This sign was really the most straightforward message that Jesus could give. Jonah’s message to speak to the Ninevites was a simple one: Repent. In Jonah’s case, one little word could fell them. “Repent” means, “Turn from your sin.” Acknowledge that your life does not match up with what God expects. For us it’s turn from imaging God to be like some kind of fad diet or financial investment which must produce results to prove its worth. Only he who seeks to do God’s good and gracious will, whether it pays off or not, truly turns to God.

But then there’s the other part of the story of Jonah: the part in which Jesus refers to Himself. Christ’s own death and resurrection were predicted by a man who was trapped for 3 days and on the 3rd raised to life. This is a word of comfort for Ninevites, a word of comfort for scribes, and a word of comfort for you. Jesus died and rose again for you.

And none of us here saw the death and resurrection of Christ. We have these only by the Word. If you’re not ready to believe that the Word is worth more than you

see and feel, then reason has blinded faith. So the resurrection of the dead is something that must be believed. I don't feel the resurrection of Christ but the Word still affirms it. I feel sin, but the Word says that it's forgiven. I see that Christians die like other men, but the Word tells me that they shall rise again. So we must not be guided by our own feelings but by the Word.

This Word of Christ is sufficient because in this Word there resides a power all its own. When God speaks, reality happens. He spoke creation into existence. Light, Sun, Moon, stars, earth, water, all plants, all living things, and mankind all came into existence out of nothing—nothing but God's Word. The ill son of the official was made well, not by a spectacular display, but by the word of Christ, "Go; your son will live." Nothing but God's word. Even King Herod wished to see a sign from Jesus. But he did not receive it. He had already had his sign when John the Baptizer stood before him and spoke directly about Herod's sins. After the King silenced John's voice of conscience, what demonstration of miraculous power could change his mind? Before His Passion, Jesus answered Herod not a word.

But Jesus speaks forth His Word for us today. It's a Word that makes new. In the waters of Holy Baptism, His Word places us, a shipwrecked people, into the sturdy and secure boat of the church until we reach the safe harbor of eternal life. In the Sacrament of the Altar, His Word feeds and forgives us, starved and wandering people, in a feast that unites us with God and all the saints, until the time when we need no more forgiveness. In these, Christ performs God's greatest miracles ever, and they happen in our time. By the Word and Sacrament, you receive eyes to see that God's Kingdom is for you.

56 years ago on this very day, Oct. 20th, 1957 the newly chartered Christ Lutheran Church held her first worship service. Now it wasn't conducted in this location, rather, just south of here in Parkville. Nonetheless, this parish-family was born by receiving the Word of God just over 50 years ago. In our Ephphatha room, where we meet for Sunday morning Bible study, there hangs a banner that proclaims that important historical fact. Yet also on that banner is a Bible verse: 2 Corinthians 5:19 which states, "In Christ God was reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation." How fitting this verse is for us! How fitting is the name CHRIST Lutheran Church! Assuredly, God is present in many churches all over the globe, but in Christ, God chooses to reconcile us in the world to Himself right here in this place, Christ Lutheran Church. He locates Himself in this place for you! He doesn't count your trespasses against you—He forgives you! Right here and right now! We, like the official in today's Gospel, believe the Word that Jesus speaks. So we also go on our way. We've been entrusted with the message of reconciliation—to tell others of Jesus and to speak His Word of forgiveness to all. Amen.

The Peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen. ✠BJF✠