

† In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. †

Quite often from this pulpit, I have preached about the great difficulties of the Christian life. About how we must live a life of suffering and persecution, and this is certainly true. The life of the Christian is one of great struggle and strife. But it is also a peaceful life. It is not against the powers of this world that we struggle, but the powers of darkness and of sin and death. And in the spiritual battles that we face, we are equipped with the greatest of all weapons and armor. We are equipped with the blood of Christ, the body broken upon the cross, and given for you. Our Lord and Commander has breached the gates of death for us and will win the day.

We have peace even in the midst of our strife because we do not fight alone. We have a God who fights for us and who promises that the war is already over, death has been defeated, sin has been defeated by Christ and his atoning sacrifice. And so we have peace, the peace of God, which is to be our stay in this great conflict against sin, which is our very present help in trouble. A peace that does not remove suffering but brings us through it. The miracle of the healing of the official's son teaches that this peace is given to us by faith and comes only to the believing, to those whose life is marked by faith in Christ.

It is a journey of sorrow that brings him to Christ. He comes in sorrow caused by the illness of his son. His rank and position made Him no exception from sorrow and trial. Make no mistake, no matter what comforts in life you may have, sorrow will come; the peace Christ gives does not mean we do not suffer, it does not exclude us from the pain of this world. Christ uses that suffering to pull us out of ourselves. The more we have, the more we have to lose; and the more we love, the more possible sources of sorrow we have. When Christ sends us an arrow of chastening, there are plenty of places it can land. Plenty of places we can be humbled. As sorrowful as this journey was, traveling to find your last hope, leaving your son who is at the point of death to try one last chance, it is indeed a journey of faith.

The sorrow doesn't remove his faith; it doesn't push him away from Christ but pulls him closer, it draws him to Christ. Without faith, he would not have come. Faith was present, but feeble; unlike the centurion, he thought that Christ could not heal without coming and that if the Son died before He came, all would be over. And so here in this journey, we see our first lesson. That little faith brings little peace. He knew there is a chance his son would be healed, but he was uncertain; he is hopeful but he does not see the fullness of Christ's mercy; he does not lay hold of the great peace Christ desires to give. But even to those with little faith, Christ still imparts peace, still stands before them as a beacon of hope.

Now the official's journey continues with Christ telling him to "go, to leave without any great sign or show of power". The one who had faith to come needed a greater faith to go away. So Christ nurses feebleness into strength by discipline. He warns against his weak faith, one based upon signs and wonders, not upon the word of God, but he also encourages and stokes the fire of faith, he does not leave us with little but gives plenty. Christ is a loving God, a merciful savior, he does not leave those sorrowing in their despair but speaks peace to them. To the official, he says "Go, your son will live". At the word of God, faith is stoked, and the small fire of faith becomes an even brighter flame. May it be so for us! For this journey shows us our second lesson, that Christ's word, his promises, bring about a greater faith, a deeper trust.

One who is built upon the word of God is built upon a solid foundation. To you, Christ does not say "Your son will live" but he says something far greater, his promises given to you are far more lasting than physical health; to you, he says: "Your sins are forgiven", "take and eat this is my body given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins", to you he gives a cleansing from sin, a pardon before God, and a promise of the resurrection, and eternal life with Him! Through these words, you have believed! Through these words, your faith is strengthened and built, not upon flashy signs and mighty deeds, but upon the incarnate word of God made flesh, broken upon a cross, given for you.

Through these words, the peace you have is assured and deepened. What does it harm you if you suffer here and now? What does it do to you if you are given great trials and adversity? You have

a God who has suffered more, a God who has poured out His entire being so that you might have eternity in paradise. Here in the promises of God, in His word, we find the peace that surpasses all understanding, the peace that lets us face trial and tribulation, for we know the end of our story, we know what is to come. Our end is found with Christ; it is eternal life with him. His word is true and does not fail; it does what it sets out to accomplish.

Lest we doubt his word, our gospel does not end with the departure of the official; we are not left to wonder if his faith is in vain, if he comes home to find his child deceased. Upon the road, the official is met by his servants who confirm Christ's words, The journey that began in sorrow comes to a joyous ending. The Official returns home with great jubilation and peace, knowing that Christ's word does what it says it will. The official returns home, bolstered by the word of God, in great peace, knowing that Christ is true to his word. And so it is for us, dear Christians. As we traverse this life, we often are met with sorrow and trials, perhaps it is a sick son, a dying father, or something different, the details don't really matter, because we know the ending to our story. We know that Christ has promised us a place in heaven, and has promised to those who believe eternal blessedness. We know that when our Lord calls us home, it will be a joyous and peaceful affair, for when we come home to the Father, when we depart this life, Christ's words will be confirmed as he welcomes us into our eternal peace with him.

† In Jesus' name. Amen. †