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Immanuel Lutheran Church, New York, NY
The Midweek Liturgy, Wednesday, August 23, 2023
Matthew 8:1-17

HOLY GOSPEL Matthew 8:1-17, RSV

¹When he [Jesus] came down from the mountain, great crowds followed him; ²and behold, a leper came to him and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, if you will, you can make me clean."
³And he stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, "I will; be clean." And immediately his leprosy was cleansed. ⁴And Jesus said to him, "See that you say nothing to any one; but go, show yourself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a proof to the people."

⁵As he entered Caper'na-um, a centurion came forward to him, beseeching him ⁶and saying, "Lord, my servant is lying paralyzed at home, in terrible distress." ⁷And he said to him, "I will come and heal him." ⁸But the centurion answered him, "Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; but only say the word, and my servant will be healed. ⁹For I am a man under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes, and to another, 'Come,' and he comes, and to my slave, 'Do this,' and he does it." ¹⁰When Jesus heard him, he marveled, and said to those who followed him, "Truly, I say to you, not even in Israel have I found such faith. ¹¹I tell you, many will come from east and west and sit at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, ¹²while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness; there men will weep and gnash their teeth." ¹³And to the centurion Jesus said, "Go; be it done for you as you have believed." And the servant was healed at that very moment.

¹⁴And when Jesus entered Peter's house, he saw his mother-in-law lying sick with a fever; ¹⁵he touched her hand, and the fever left her, and she rose and served him. ¹⁶That evening they brought to him many who were possessed with demons; and he cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were sick. ¹⁷This was to fulfil what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah, "He took our infirmities and bore our diseases."

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

Our reading begins with reference to a mountain:

¹When he [Jesus] came down from the mountain, great crowds followed him; (Matthew 8:1, RSV)

What mountain is this? It is the mountain on which Jesus had just preached his Sermon on the Mount. After preaching, Jesus does not take a nap, as I usually do. Rather he comes down the mountain and continues his combat with the devil on behalf of humanity. His preaching and his healing are all of a piece. He is out to save the world!

My main text for this evening is the summary of things at the end of our reading from Matthew 8. Jesus has healed a leper. He has healed the servant of the centurion. He has healed Peter's mother-in-law. Verses 16 and 17, then, summarize things. The verses go this way:

¹⁶That evening they brought to him many who were possessed with demons; and he cast out the spirits with a word, and *healed all who were sick*. ¹⁷This was to fulfil what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah, "He took our infirmities and bore our diseases." (Matthew 8:16-17, RSV)

We human beings long for many things. Among them, we would love to be healed of our infirmities. We would love to be well.

Back in the 1940s to the 1970s, there was a faith healer here in America named Kathryn Kuhlman. An estimated two million people reported that they were healed in her meetings over the years.¹ My Dad hoped to be one of them.

He had cancer. He was a young man, but he had terminal cancer. He wanted to live because he wanted to take care of his family. He was a devout man, and he trusted his soul to Jesus, and yet he hoped to live. Though he was a faithful Catholic, he heard tell of Kathryn Kuhlman, an evangelical, and requested to go to her healing service in Pittsburgh. Looking back at my childhood family, I am rather amazed at how calm we were at just about everything that came along. We were poor, but not anxious about it. And Dad was terribly sick, but we took it in stride. I remember little about Dad's trip to Pittsburgh to see Kathryn Kuhlman. It was just another calm thing we did. I did not go on that trip, but I do seem to remember us loading Dad on a mattress in the back of a station wagon and off he went to Pittsburgh. He came home, and was not healed, and life went on. But my! I wish he had been healed. It would not be unheard of for my father to still be alive nowadays. If he had lived, he would be 95 years old now. Some people live to be that old. And if he had lived, I would have had my father all my life till now, instead of

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kathryn_Kuhlman

losing him when I was a college student. He was a good man. I wish I had him still.

This evening's reading ends with a reference to Isaiah 53:4. Most English translations put the Isaiah verse this way:

Surely he has borne our griefs
and carried our sorrows;
yet we esteemed him stricken,
smitten by God, and afflicted. (Isaiah 53:4, RSV)

But St. Matthew chooses a bit different wording. Where the usual word in the Isaiah passage is "sorrows," St. Matthew speaks of "diseases." And so we read this:

"He took our infirmities and bore our *diseases*." (Matthew 8:17, RSV)

Both are lovely translations and both are legitimate. But on this evening, I am especially drawn to the way St. Matthew put it: Jesus bore our diseases.

We are used to saying that Jesus bore our sins on the cross. This is great comfort to us sinners who are stricken in conscience. But it accords with the life practice of Jesus to think that he bore our diseases too. He was mindful of disease. He noticed it. He fought against it. And so, he healed the leper and he healed Peter's mother-in-law. When Jesus gazes out at our world, he is troubled by sin and crime and whatnot, but also he is troubled by sickness, by arthritis, by loss of hearing, by loss of memory. All of those aches and pains and losses that we grieve about are things He grieves about too.

If he were not risen from the dead, we would have to made do with this world's physicians and nurses and medical technicians and nursing aids, and God bless them every one! But we have hope that goes beyond this world's doctors. We have a hope that will not fail us. Indeed, we have this world's Great Physician of body and soul, even Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom belongs the glory, with the Father and the Holy Spirit now and forever. Amen.