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Immanuel Lutheran Church, New York, NY
The Midweek Liturgy, Wednesday, March 12, 2024
Matthew 15:29-39
Healing the Lame and Other Sick Folk

HOLY GOSPELMatthew 15:29-39, RSV
Last week we read about the faith of the Canaanite woman who sought the help of Jesus for her daughter. Now we read about Jesus healing many people and about the feeding of the four thousand.

²⁹And Jesus went on from there and passed along the Sea of Galilee. And he went up on the mountain, and sat down there. ³⁰And great crowds came to him, bringing with them the lame, the maimed, the blind, the dumb, and many others, and they put them at his feet, and he healed them, ³¹so that the throng wondered, when they saw the dumb speaking, the maimed whole, the lame walking, and the blind seeing; and they glorified the God of Israel.

³²Then Jesus called his disciples to him and said, "I have compassion on the crowd, because they have been with me now three days, and have nothing to eat; and I am unwilling to send them away hungry, lest they faint on the way." ³³And the disciples said to him, "Where are we to get bread enough in the desert to feed so great a crowd?" ³⁴And Jesus said to them, "How many loaves have you?" They said, "Seven, and a few small fish." ³⁵And commanding the crowd to sit down on the ground, ³⁶he took the seven loaves and the fish, and having given thanks he broke them and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. ³⁷And they all ate and were satisfied; and they took up seven baskets full of the broken pieces left over. ³⁸Those who ate were four thousand men, besides women and children. ³⁹And sending away the crowds, he got into the boat and went to the region of Mag'adan.

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

We are near the end of Chapter 15 of St. Matthew's Gospel. In the previous Chapter, we heard about the feeding of the five thousand. Now, we read of the feeding of the four thousand. In both cases, Jesus is moved by compassion. He remembers our frame. He remembers that we need not only good ideas, but also food. So, he feeds the multitudes both in Chapter 14 and in Chapter 15.

This feeding of the four thousand is a great story, but I want this evening to focus on an earlier part of our reading — the story of Jesus healing the lame, the maimed, the blind, the dumb, and many others. This is a story brimming with hope for people whose bodies are letting them down these days.

Especially I am interested in those lame folks making their way up the mountain to sit at the feet of Jesus. I'm not a good walker these days. My wife, Carol, is a great walker. She has hiked up Mt. Kilimanjaro in Tanzania, Africa, and she has walked the Camino pilgrimage path in Spain. So, she is a good walker, but not me. My feet hurt. It is pretty mild, but still they hurt. Maybe things will get better down the road, because we have marvelous doctors here in New York City, but for now my feet hurt a bit. They have hurt for years now. It doesn't stop me from anything important. I am able to visit homebound members and the people in the hospital, and I can walk around the Botanical Garden with Carol, but it is not free and easy, my walking.

So, I sympathize with the lame folks walking up a mountain to see Jesus. I would indeed walk up a mountain to see Jesus. Of course I would! But it would not be easy for me. And I am sure that it was not easy for the lame people in today's Gospel story to climb that mountain to Jesus.

I hope they had some friend or neighbor to help them along — give them a hand or an arm over the rough places. Same with the other folks climbing that mountain to see Jesus: the maimed, the blind, the dumb, and many others. I hope they had friends to help them along the way.

And here is my theme: When those lame and blind and dumb and many others reached Jesus and sat at his feet, they thereby found their greatest Friend. What a Friend we have in Jesus!

Jesus was not running for election. He did not heal these suffering people for the sake of votes. He is indeed the Great Physician of body and soul, but he is not the kind of Physician who requires money. The lame, the maimed, the blind, the dumb, and many others made their way up the mountain. They end up at the feet of Jesus, and he up and heals them. That is the kind of heart Jesus has. Later in our reading, Jesus feeds the four thousand. He does it for the same reason he healed those who sat at his feet:

I have compassion on the crowd... (Matthew 15:32, RSV)

He said.

To have "compassion" means that, in some true measure, you suffer along with someone. You do not look at that one and remain unmoved, but rather feel a tug on your heart to help that person if you can. And Jesus can! He sure can! And he will, in due season!

After Jesus healed the disabled people at his feet, our text speaks of glorifying God:

³¹so that the throng wondered, when they saw the dumb speaking, the maimed whole, the lame walking, and the blind seeing; and they glorified the God of Israel.
(Matthew 15:31, RSV)

This is the right thing to do. If you have recently been healed, then it is good to give thanks to God for that. It is good to give thanks to God's servants, the doctors and nurses and technicians, but also it is good to give thanks to God himself for your healing.

And if you have not yet been healed, at least you can give thanks to God for your hope of healing. It is one thing to go through life suffering but hopeful. It is another thing, and a sorrowful thing, to go through life suffering and hopeless.

The reason you and I can have hope of healing is the same reason that those folks on the mountain had: I mean, Jesus. One part of the meaning of Easter is that Jesus lives and is able to look upon us with compassion. Here and now, this very instant, Jesus regards us, sympathizes with our illnesses and suffering, and feels that he must and will help. The timing is up to his wisdom and that of God the Father and God the Son. But if we know anything at all about the heart of Jesus, we know that he is the Man of Compassion. He will heal us someday. He will reach us. Nothing can stop him from reaching us and healing us. And to him belongs the glory, with the Father and the Holy Spirit now and forever. Amen.