

The Gospel According to Saint Matthew

Session 8 – Wednesday May 20, 2020

We have been looking at the nine healing miracles and one nature miracle of Jesus following the Sermon on the Mount. Matthew connects the healings with Jesus' Crucifixion, in that He takes sin and death into Himself on the Cross, which brings about our healing and wholeness in Christ's Resurrection. There is an aligning of sin and illness, while refuting the idea that sin is the cause of specific illnesses. Similarly, there is an aligning of faith and healing, but the connection is not at all precise.

The variety of means of healings make clear that Jesus, like His Father, is able to effect His will immediately and anywhere.

8:23-27 – the calming of the storm

In this passage we find a *testing* of the disciples. Although the word is not used, it is the same word as *temptation*. We have seen that *temptation* is necessarily part of being *sons of God*, individually and corporately.

In Mark's account the disciples enter the boat with Jesus. Matthew has the disciples enter following Jesus. A subtle point about discipleship.

You of little faith. Common phrase for Matthew. We encountered it first in the Sermon on the Mount, in that passage about not being anxious – the flowers of the field are clothed by God, why are you anxious, you of little

faith? We shall encounter it again: 14:31; 16:8; 17:20. Is it a criticism?

Perhaps, but maybe it is merely an acknowledgement that *little faith* is the disciples' condition. It is not *no* faith. A *little* begins discipleship.

We shall encounter a very similar passage again in Chapter 14.

Lord, save us! Is the central point of this passage. We have seen that the disciples in Matthew's gospel represent the disciples in every age. So this cry is the common cry of God's people to their Saviour.

There are two Old Testament passages that come to mind in Matthew's narrative. In the story of Jonah (and the whale), Jonah attempts to flee from God's commission by getting into a boat. While he is asleep a storm arises, which is calmed when He is sacrificed – thrown overboard. This nature miracle of Jesus, like the healings, is thereby connected with the Cross. We will encounter Jonah again 12:39.

The passage may also have reference to Psalm 107.

They that go down to the sea in ships...

So they cry unto the Lord in their trouble, and He delivers them from their distress.

For He makes the storm to cease, so that the waves are still. Then are they glad, because they are at rest; and so he brings them to the haven where they would be.

The *haven they desire*, may be a reference to the kingdom of heaven, the Sabbath rest, which has been a significant theme for Matthew.

Vv28-34 - Healing of the demoniacs

Jesus is recognized by the spirits, and addressed very clearly as *Son of God*. It's quite dramatic to hear them say it, because the disciples in the boat do not say anything so clear. They ask *Who is this?* Truth can be revealed through evil, as Herod's slaughter of the Innocents reveals Jesus' identity as the true King of Israel more clearly.

It was the common understanding that evil spirits were given power on earth until the final judgement. So, the demons ask, *Have you come to torment us before the time?*

Mark and Luke record a single demoniac, Matthew speaks of two. We find this elsewhere in Matthew. Is Matthew just trying to express the multiplicity of demons – *two thousand* according to Mark? Perhaps. I think it has to do with Matthew's emphasis on the community. An individual is healed in a healing community.

The narrative raises heaps of questions: *Why into the herd of swine? What happened to the demons when the pigs drowned? Did they not will to enter into the two people, and if so, why do they need Jesus to move them into the swine? Why does Jesus agree to their request?*

Matthew makes no attempt to answer any of these questions. That is not why he has included this healing narrative. Pure speculation is not discipleship.

The passage reveals the self-destructive character of evil, and Jesus' power, authority, will, to over-come that power. We are reminded of the Holy Spirit remaining with Jesus following His baptism, and remaining with Him as He goes into the wilderness to confront and defeat the devil.

Perhaps the most surprising thing about this passage is that those *on the other side*, do not welcome Jesus but ask Him to leave. It is a clear example of *Do not cast pearls before swine*.

9:1-8 healing of paralytic

One of Matthew's early *fulfilment prophecies* identifies Jesus as a Nazarite / Nazarene. In Chapter 9 Jesus' *own city* is applied to Capernaum, Jesus' adopted city. This may be an important idea, in that Jesus makes His home where His disciples are.

The healing of the centurion's servant was made in connection with the *faith* of the centurion, not the servant. Here, the faith is communal - *their* faith - which includes both the paralytic's and his friends.

The Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins... rise, take up your bed and go home.

Going Home, is a theme we have encountered repeatedly in the references to the Exodus and the Exile. Jesus has come to bring us to our true home in the kingdom of heaven. The healing of the paralytic is connected with that kingdom.

When the crowds saw it they were afraid, and they glorified God. Their response is the same as the Gadarenes - but they didn't ask Jesus to leave, they glorified God.

VV9-13 call of Matthew

The call of Matthew is similar to the call of the first disciples. There is an immediate response to the call. But this time there is no explicit empowering to go along with the call – *Follow me, and I will make you fishers.*

However, the next sentence indicates that Jesus has empowered Matthew's discipleship. There is a dinner with many tax collectors. He's fishing effectively.

Earlier we saw that the reference to dining connected Jesus' healings with the OT imagery of the kingdom of heaven as a banquet (8:11). I think we are to continue that imagery here. *Reclining at table*, indicates a special feast.

Luke's gospel makes clear that this banquet is thrown by Matthew / Levi in honour of Jesus. A thanksgiving banquet.

The healthy have no need for a doctor... I call not the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

This brings to mind the way in which John the Baptist and Jesus both begin their ministries: *Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.* It also recalls the first Beatitude: *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

In between these two sayings Matthew records Jesus citing Scripture: *Go and learn what this means: I desire mercy, and not sacrifice (Hosea 6:6).*

Last week we looked at the passage in 8:18-22, where two people offered to become disciples of Jesus. He wasn't very welcoming of them. The first addresses Jesus as *Teacher*, and that is how the Pharisees address Jesus in this narrative. Matthew seems to be indicating that title is insufficient. It's true, and Jesus teaches the Pharisees – *Go and learn what this means...*

Learning is not enough: there needs to be a connection between thought and deed, the application of righteousness / holiness in a loving way.

At this same banquet disciples of John the Baptist come to Jesus and ask about fasting. We note that John's disciples go to Jesus and ask why His disciples do not fast, whereas the Pharisees went to the disciples to ask why their teacher doesn't fast.

Jesus spoke about fasting in the Sermon on the Mount, and approves of it, when done *in secret*. His answer here uses two OT images for the kingdom of heaven – the *wedding feast* and *new wine*. He answers by associating Himself, and His disciples, with the kingdom. We will encounter further references to wedding banquets (22:1-14; 25:1-13). Further, John's disciples are asking questions about *righteousness*, and Jesus sets Himself at the centre of the answer. What is *righteous* can only be determined by reference to Jesus – not any other Law or authority.

The bridegroom *will be taken away*, Jesus says – not a very clear Passion prediction, but that is what it is pointing toward, and the *pouring out of the wine, spilling of the wine*, underscores the reference.

Unlike Mark and Luke, Matthew adds the last line of this narrative – *so both are preserved*.

The *new wine* is the reality of the kingdom of heaven coming near in Jesus; the new *skin* is faithful obedience to the Law of Moses as Jesus teaches and lives it. He has come to fulfil the Law not abolish it – both are preserved in Christ.

Vv18-26

While he was yet speaking...

Matthew uses such phrases to connect all of these healing narratives. We are to understand them as a unit, and that they all are connected with the messianic banquet.

We have two healing narratives intertwined. The *ruler* indicates a synagogue leader. He *kneels* before Jesus, but doesn't address Him as *Lord*. Yet, he expresses faith in Jesus' ability to do far more than we have seen Him do so far - to raise his daughter from the dead. Jesus responds immediately, and His disciples follow.

On the way a woman who suffered from a haemorrhage for twelve years reaches out and touches Jesus' garment.

We note that the woman's haemorrhage has been for twelve years. Twelve may represent the tribes of Israel - so the woman may represent the whole nation's suffering.

Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well. *Take heart*, is how Jesus addressed the paralytic. Matthew uses *made well* three times in quick succession. It is the same word for *saved, made whole*. The multiple uses allows manifold nuances. It is a word found frequently in Matthew where it applies specifically to salvation (1:21; 10:22; 16:25; 18:11; 19:25).

Nb. Most translations use *fringe* or *hem*. But there are some who suggest that it refers to the tassels that are required by the Law to be worn on outer garments (Numbers 15:38-41; Deuteronomy 22:12). Some scholars see this as being connected with Zechariah 8:23, which speaks about the coming of the Kingdom. That passage begins with a reference to fasting turning into feasting, (which discussion Jesus has just been having with John's disciples),

and ends *In those days ten men from the nations of every tongue shall take hold of the robe of a Jew, saying, 'let us go with you [to Jerusalem], for we have heard that God is with you.*

The first narrative resumes. Mark says that the girl is twelve years old. Perhaps Matthew drops that reference to help ensure that we don't allegorize everything.

Jesus says the girl is *sleeping*. It is a term for death that the Church picks up as we discover in Paul's letters (1 Thess 5:10; Eph 5:14). Jesus isn't denying the girl's death - only the finality of that death. Jesus takes her hand, and immediately the *girl arose*.

The surprising thing about this narrative is how little commentary Matthew adds. There is nothing said about the *ruler's* great faith, nor the astonishment of the crowds. It is simply told by Matthew, and simply spread among the people.

Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.. how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask Him 7:7-12

These two narratives are interwoven to help illustrate the unity of all these miracles, and with the symbolic reference to the 12 tribes of Israel, to proclaim that Jesus heals and raises to new life both individuals and the nation. And yet, the crowds are put outside the room where the girl is raised, which reminds us of Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount that *Only those who enter by the narrow gate come to the Kingdom of heaven.*

These two healing narratives express the faith and experience of the Church. The repetition of *made well, made whole, saved*, is the new life that

the disciples of Jesus know in themselves; and reveals the faith of the Church that, though we shall fall asleep, yet shall we be raised in Christ.

We have spoken about the disciples as being paradigmatic for disciples in every age. We do what they do, because they follow Christ in thought and deed. We should be hearing the Church's faith being articulated in the gospel.

Vv 27-31 healing of two blind persons

Matthew doubles the healings recorded by the other synoptic writers: 2 demoniacs, 2 blind persons.

Mark's *messianic secret*, is retained by Matthew, but it has none of the weight and character that it does for Mark.

Again, *Lord*, aligns the characters with the disciples. Perhaps more significantly, the use of *Son of David*, which is such an important identification of Jesus in the first two chapters. It is a reference to the king whose kingdom will have no end in 2 Samuel 7:12-16.

The healing of the blind is an important ministry of the Messiah, the King of Israel. It will be the first thing Jesus mentions when the disciples of John come to Him, whether He is the One they are looking for (11:5). Matthew records another healing of two other blind people later in the gospel (20:29).

This is the only time Jesus asks directly *Do you believe?* In other healing of the blind narratives Jesus asks, *What do you want me to do?* This direct question underscores the role of faith mentioned in the other healings we've encountered in this section.

It is faith, not only in Jesus' power, but the use of *Son of David*, indicates faith in the whole of God's saving activity. We can believe that these blind people heard about Jesus proclaiming the coming of the kingdom, and made the association between Jesus and the promised Messiah. That is, they know Jesus, because they know the Scriptures.

Vv32-34 healing of mute

This tenth miracle is the simplest of all. There are no words, no deeds, just pure will. Jesus wills to heal and the man is healed.

There is an almost identical passage in Chapter 12, but there the man is both blind and mute.

The periscope ends with two different responses to the same event. The crowd marvels; the Pharisees condemn. We are reminded of the end of the Sermon on the Mount: *The crowds were astonished because He taught with authority, and not as the Pharisees* 7:28f

The Pharisees don't deny Jesus' power, but they deny the power to be of God. This is the first openly hostile judgment made by the Pharisees; in 9:3 it is private; in 9:14 it is only implicit. But from here the hostility escalates. There is a hardening of the lines. True Israel marvels at Jesus' works. The Pharisees, those who apparently kept the Law, harden their hearts.

Vv35-38

Come to the end of this section which began with the call of the disciples.

They were like sheep without a shepherd. Common OT phrase (Num 27:17; 2 Chron 18:16; Jdt 11:19)

What grieves Jesus is not the amount of sickness, but the spiritual need of the people.

Blessed are the poor in spirit – those who know they are not self-sufficient, but require grace from outside. Grace from God, from the shepherds of Israel, the community of the faithful disciples.

God is the shepherd of Israel – so is the King, the Son of David.

Pray the Lord of the harvest to send forth labourers into His harvest.

Disciples are fishers, and they are shepherds, and they are field hands. And yet, at the heart of all of Jesus' words and deeds, is the proclamation of the *gospel of the kingdom* (4:23; 9:35; 24:14). Jesus is the embodiment of that kingdom, as we learned in the genealogy in chapter 1.