**I Am Not Worthy**

Based on [Matthew 8:1-13](https://biblia.com/books/esv/Mt8.1-13)

Preached on January 26, 2020

Third Sunday after the Epiphany

Pastor Nathan Fuehrer

In today’s gospel, Jesus does two healing miracles. One is for a leper, and the other for a roman centurion. In the example of the leper, he ministers to those who were considered unworthy of God. In the example of the centurion, he ministers to those who *considered themselves unworthy of* God. Here, Jesus shows us the heart of the God when he reveals to us what kind of a servant He has came to be. In the previous chapters of Matthew, Jesus preaches his sermon on the mount which began with the beatitudes….blessed are the poor, the meek, those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Today’s gospel begins with him coming down from that mountain to practice what he preached. When he came down from the mountain...a meek and mourning leper came asking Jesus to make him clean.

Lepers were outcasts, cut off from the community, from their family on account of their disease because to touch them was to become unclean. They were quarantined, and though it seems unmerciful it makes practical sense. If the lepers lived in the community everyone would be unclean, so the lepers were quarantined. People are quarantined now in China because of the Corona Virus, and I think we are all glad they are. It is an important detail that Jesus *touched* the leper to heal him. In touching the leper, Jesus fulfills the prophecy which reads, “**Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows**”. In healing the leper, he rendered himself unclean before God. Many times he did this. He was sent into the world as a sacrificial lamb and scapegoat. By living amongst us and by fulfilling all righteousness in our midst, he was baptized into our sins. He took on sickness, uncleanness, and guilt, in order to give us his righteousness.

On Good Friday, it is common for people to weep for Jesus’ suffering and dying. Don’t weep for Jesus, weep for yourselves and for your sins. You are like that leper who made Jesus unclean so that you could be well. You might think it’s selfish to cast your illnesses upon him. But that’s what he came for. Don’t think that you will carry your own sins to spare Jesus. You are not Jesus’ saviour; He is yours.

Jesus came to bear your sins, lest they crush you. Isn’t is humbling to be so needy? It is embarrassing to be so weak that you would put your sins on Jesus to save yourself. But you are, after all, a poor miserable sinner. And to the degree that you are truly a christian. You are on the fringes, an outcast, a stranger in a strange world. You hate your sin but cannot free yourself from it, you can only do so at God’s expense. And God paid the cost in the person of His only begotten son, who for the joy sent before him endured the cross, scorning the shame, and now sits at the right hand of glory.

Jesus revealed his heart by ministering to those thought to be least favoured by God. Jesus said, “It is not the healthy who need a physician, but the sick. So too I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.” And sinners are not only those who were within the kingdom of God, but those who were not. Jesus answers the request of a Roman centurion, who is not a “son of the kingdom.” And this gentile shows a degree of faith unseen by Jesus in Israel. Because he said, “Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof, but only say the word, and my servant will be healed.”

The centurion first confesses his unworthiness to receive Jesus. The way that he confesses this is jarring. Most of the supposed religious folk though that they were worthy to receive Jesus, either because of their religous practices or because of their status. The Pharisees would brag that they would fast, and tithe, and observe festivals and that this made them worthy to receive the Lord. Jews thought that they were worthy to stand before God because they had the blood of Abraham, regardless of whether they had repentance or faith of the heart. But this gentile says frankly that he has done nothing to deserve Jesus, nor does his high ranking as a centurion and man with authority, make him worthy.

It is easy to think that our communion practice is the same sort of thing, and in some churches I’ve seen it. They claim to practice closed communion, but let relatives of prestigious members commune simply because of their status. Others think that they deserve Jesus because they attend church every week and give tithes, though they don’t believe his body and blood are given in the supper. No, the point of closed communion is not to keep people away from Jesus who don’t have the right family name or who don’t work hard at keeping traditions. Closed communion is to keep people away from Jesus who refuse to recieve him by faith. We are worthy to approach the altar of God by faith and faith alone. This faith is seen in works, but not in human traditions or in the ability to live an outwardly flawless life. Faith is seen in repentance, knowing your sin, confessing your sin from the heart, and wanting to do better.

Jesus came and ministered to the needy. He ministered not only to those who were thought to be unworthy of God. He ministered to those who *considered themselves to be* unworthy. The leper was miserable in the world because of his sick condition, but the centurion was miserable because of his sinful condition. Because he said, “I am not worthy”, Jesus counted him worthy.

Because we confess that our thoughts, words and deeds are unworthy, God makes us worthy by faith alone. And by faith alone, we are counted worthy to have him enter the house of our frail bodies, orally as he invites us to eat his body and drink his blood for the forgiveness of our sins. He has instituted this sacrament. He has said the words 2000 years, and we are healed through the sacrament in this house today.