
Grace be with you and peace from God, our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ

“The Lord will give strength to his people; the Lord will bless his people with peace.” Ps.29,11

Collect:

Merciful Lord, grant to your faithful people pardon and peace, that we may be cleansed from all our sins and serve you with a quiet mind; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

Lord God almighty

1 Lord God almighty, Father of all mercies,
well-spring of goodness, fount of all things living,
we now Your children, blessed by loving kindness,
come with thanksgiving.

2 Hear us who praise You, first for our creation,
formed in Your likeness, breath and being gaining;
then for our keeping, life in all its fulness
daily sustaining.

3 But above all things, for the gift of Jesus,
love past comparing, source of our salvation;
humbly we bring You, for a world's redeeming,
our adoration.

4 So in thanksgiving for the hope of glory,
love, grace and mercy all our days attending,
more than our lips, Lord, let our living praise You,
ages unending.

Words by Timothy Dudley-Smith

Readings: Is.40,21-31 / Ps.147,1-11.20c / 1Cor.9,16-23

Mk.1,29-39:

As soon as they left the synagogue, they went with James and John to the home of Simon and Andrew. Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they immediately told Jesus about

her. So he went to her, took her hand and helped her up. The fever left her and she began to wait on them.

That evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all who were ill and demon-possessed. The whole town gathered at the door, and Jesus healed many who had various diseases. He also drove out many demons, but he would not let the demons speak because they knew who he was.

Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. Simon and his companions went to look for him, and when they found him, they exclaimed: 'Everyone is looking for you!' Jesus replied, 'Let us go somewhere else – to the nearby villages – so that I can preach there also. That is why I have come.' So he travelled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons.

Dear friends

There is a reason why Simon's mother-in-law was unable to welcome Jesus and his disciples in the proper manner. "I must apologise", Simon might have said to Jesus, "but my mother-in-law is down with a fever, a really bad one. She is too weak to do anything, let alone wait on us, as she would dearly love to." And to this he will have added: "But perhaps you could take a look at her? We would really like you to".

And then there is a reason why not long after this same woman, having lain on her bed disabled by a severe fever, was up and waiting on her guests with renewed strength: that reason was Jesus' intervening and healing action.

This is then repeated multiple times as "*people brought to him all who were ill and demon-possessed*" so that he should heal them. Which he did. For each there was a reason why their life was one of 'night and darkness' rather than 'light and day'. And for each of them there was then in Jesus that which became to them the reason why they were made well and were returned from their night to a new day.

To all these people Jesus gave access to what they were lacking. He was the reason why they got and received what they were lacking. And what, we have to ask (!), was the way by which they gained access? This is really the question that Jesus wanted everyone to ask and know the answer to. Because the answer is 'faith'! Indeed, everything that Jesus does here is in a way a lesson about 'faith'.

Access is by faith – that is the message here, so much so that where faith is missing, access is denied. "*It is impossible without faith to please God*" (Hebr.11,6). It is by faith that Jesus becomes to a person the reason why they are made well. Which is why Jesus on several occasions says to the person he healed: "*Your faith has made you well!*"

This reality of faith giving access is here simply and beautifully placed before us to see: The people, by coming to Jesus and seeking him, *acknowledge* Jesus as 'the reason why', that is, they *acknowledge* him as the one through whom God is savingly at work, they *trust* him and they listen to his word to *obey* it. Here you have the elements that make up the faith that gains access – in its complete form: *acknowledging* who Jesus is (the Son of God who has come in the flesh, into our history of space and time, died on the cross and was raised from the dead), *trusting* him and *obeying* his word.

Dear friends, the lesson here is to us all – faith in Jesus is the way by which we gain access to him, who in his own person is the reason why life is made well. But if we let the lesson end here, we might still miss the point, that is we might still miss the goal that is life made well. Because we might be like those to whom access is denied when it transpires that they seek it for the wrong reason, or

certainly not for the right one.

This seems to be what was behind Jesus' reply to his disciples when they came looking for him and told him that everyone was looking for him, presumably so that he should make them well too! His reply, strangely, was: *"Let us go somewhere else – to the nearby villages – so that I can preach there also. That is why I have come."* Let us not think for a minute that Jesus said this because he was not concerned that people should be made well. He said it because he was!

The same lies behind his injunction to the demons not to speak out what they knew about him. He did it because if he had let them "tell the truth" it would not have furthered the cause of faith but undermined it. The thing, you see, would have taken a wrong turn. In what way? In this way, that some people would have sought access to what they were lacking for the wrong reason, while others would have looked on but not seen any reason in their own case to have faith: "We're not lacking like those demon-possessed lot or like those who have a real and serious illness; no need for us, like it is for them, to join the queue!"

What appears here is illustrated with some force of clarity in Jesus' reply to some Pharisees when they were objecting very strongly to his dining out with sinners and treating them like friends: *"It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but those who are ill. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."* (Lk.5,32) Now what is he saying to them? To us? What is he saying to you? Is he not saying that he has come because you too need to be made well, because you are sick and are lacking what makes life well? Is he not saying that it is wrong and in danger of missing salvation (the point) to make two distinct groups and then count yourself in with those who don't need access, don't need to believe? Is he not saying that you too need the gospel preached to you and believe it? Is he not saying that he is calling you to repentance and the forgiveness of your sins?

This is precisely what he is saying. He is not leaving the Pharisees out of the call to repentance. Nor me. Nor you. Because he has come to make life well!

What he shows by silencing the demons so they can't speak out and by saying to the disciples *'Let us go somewhere else so that I can preach there also, for that is why I have come'*, is that our life is not made well by being given access to all that we might be lacking, but by having access to the Word of God and to his kingdom. Does God's Word not say that *"Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God."* (Mt.4,4; Dt.8,3)

We are not made for a life that is lacking what makes it well: GOD – knowledge of him, reconciliation with him and peace, righteousness before him and holiness in living, his present help enjoyed by his people; we are not meant to journey on the road and head towards the exit of sin and death and hell, a journey the demons approve of and want to see us on, but we are meant for salvation and life made well!

Dear friends, in Simon's mother-in-law we have an image of a life made well through faith in Jesus: It is a life rising with renewed strength *to serve him*, a life that *in serving him* and being his is no longer lacking. In Jesus taking her hand and helping her up we have an image of God's saving action through the preaching of the gospel and of the power of faith.

"I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes." (Rm.1,16)

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: the old one has gone, the new is here! All of this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God was making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf:

be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” (2Cor.5,17-21)

AMEN

0 Christ the King of glory

1 O Christ the King of glory,
who chose the way of loss
to share our human story,
to bear that bitter cross;
by loving self-surrender,
by all the pains You bore,
You won for us the splendour
of life for evermore.

2 May God, whose care unsleeping
holds all beneath His hand,
enfold within His keeping
the Church in every land.
Through doubtings and denials,
through grief to glory come,
through all their fiery trials
He leads His children home.

3 O Lord of life, ascended
to glory from the grave,
Your grace be still extended
to help and heal and save.
O Captain of salvation,
in mercy bring to birth
Your new redeemed creation
from all the pains of earth.

4 To God alone be blessing
and heartfelt ceaseless praise,
a love beyond expressing,
to everlasting days.
Proclaim salvation's story,
dominions, thrones and powers!
By cross and grave and glory
a living hope is ours.

Words by Timothy Dudley-Smith

Prayer:

Lord God, we praise and thank you for your mercy in which through Jesus you have sought us in order to make us well. When we consider the obstacles we put in your way, trying to supplant your plan for us with our own and make it serve our own ends, we marvel at your mercy and rely on it the more, knowing that were it not for your faithfulness we would be our own total undoing. Help us to repent of our tendency, overcoming us time and again, to make idols of our wants, and restore in us a pure heart and a right spirit. Let the preaching of your word, by which our life is reconciled to you and made well, be in power through the Holy Spirit – both in hearing and in speaking, for the sake of your Son our Lord Jesus Christ.

- time of prayer / intercession –

‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For yours is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen

Live in union with Christ Jesus as Lord, be rooted in him, be built in him, grow strong in the faith; let your hearts overflow with thankfulness.

And the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit be among you and remain with you.

AMEN