

March 12, 2023
The Third Sunday in Lent
Pastor Matt Duerr

“All This Took Place-For Their Sake”

Grace, mercy, and peace, be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, Amen. As you know where you are in the Lenten Season. It's the third Sunday in Lent and our theme this season is: All This Took Place. But the first week we saw all this; all the prophecies being fulfilled as Saint Matthew recorded them in his gospel. All this took place to fulfill prophecy. Last week, we saw that by faith all this took place as we looked at that Hall of Fame of Faith. And then saw it in action with Jairus, whose daughter had died and Jesus said she was only sleeping, others mocked, and Christ's words to him were “do not fear only believe” or only have faith.

This week, all this took place for their sake. Well, who was the “their?” Let me just be very clear, this is not going to be a sermon about proper pronoun usage as we hear so much of today. No, ‘their’ is definitely a reference to the Jewish people. But it's more. Going back to our Epiphany series on making Christ manifest; in the sermon titled Lineage Lane we see that “in you all nations will be blessed.” God's words to Abraham. So, how does this work, all nations being blessed through Abraham or through the Jewish people?

Well, Saint Paul lays it out for us in Romans 10 and 11. First of all, he begins right away by saying brethren my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved. The people through whom the Christ came, of whom Paul was one of, it was his heart's desire and prayer to God that the Jewish people would be saved. Yet, he has this to say about the Jewish people, it's sort of a compliment, “for I bear them witness. They have a great zeal for God but not according to knowledge. What's he talking about? Let's see what he says next. For they are ignorant of the righteousness of God. Yes, they have great zeal, but they didn't know about the righteousness of God. Yet, understand Saint Paul was a pharisee. If he was here right now, he would attest to the fact that there is hardly a Jew that doesn't agree God is righteous. The issue is

The Righteousness. The righteousness is Christ in the flesh who has come from God. Saint Paul writes in first Corinthians 1:30 He, Jesus became our righteousness. And so, he exhorts the people in Romans 13:14 “put on the Lord Jesus Christ.” Put on His righteousness. He puts it this way and Ephesians 4:24 “Put on the new self. It's a very new self. His point is this Israel, the Hebrews the Jews sought a righteousness with a zeal, but it was all “I based.” I'm earning this righteousness. They did not have God's righteousness or submit to God's righteousness. Much like Americans, they probably would have loved that song “I did it my way.” And that's where they were headed their way.

Romans 10 verse six tells us we are saved on a righteousness by faith. Faith in what? Paul continues in verse 9, “if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your hearts that God raised Him from the dead you will be saved.” Now we have to think about this in the context that it's written in, otherwise this verse can be highly misconstrued and misinterpreted. Paul has written to “all those in Rome and are loved by God and called to be Saints. Who were these people in Rome? Primarily Jewish converts to Christianity. And they were facing a double whammy. As he says, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead; if they confess that and truly believed it and said that in the synagogue- they would be cast out of the synagogue for blasphemy. And yet, if they said that with their mouth and believed it in their heart and the Romans heard of it- they would not be cast out of Roman society, but they would be cast into the Colosseum for the games and be martyred. So, this wasn't just words ‘Jesus is my savior,’ it is really an issue of the heart that you're so convicted of that you're willing to die. Or as Paul continues and says, “for with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.” If you truly believe, you won't deny Jesus, you'll stand up for Him. And he also makes it very clear by saying there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; or might I say Roman or Gentile. Because Paul continues and says for everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

And then he goes through this little logic exercise, an exercise in the and the Great Commission and logical at that. But I believe very important for every Christian. For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved; how will they call if they don't believe. And how will they believe they have never heard? And how will they hear if no one has preached to them? And how will someone preach unless they are sent? To sum up, faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the Word of Christ. And I fear that all too often in our modern age the church looks at that and goes; "and that pastor is exactly why we called you." We called you to preach. Now you preach to us so we can believe, and we believe, and we're saved. And yet how will they call if they don't believe? It's all premised on well, that Word being preached. And it doesn't say Pastors. It's all of us! In fact, Saint Paul says, 'how beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news because they're living the gospel.

And that is brought out so clearly in our gospel reading this morning from Luke Chapter 7. Talk about beautiful feet! Some Christian, some beautifully footed person, shared this gospel message with a Roman. A Roman centurion, no less, an occupier of the Promised Land around Capernaum, Jesus's home base. This Roman centurion, we read, sent to Him, Jesus; elders of the Jews asking Him to come and heal his servant. Well that right there tells us a couple of things. Number one this Roman centurion is a pretty good guy. He cares about his servant. He wants his servant to live. As a Roman, he can get new servants anytime. But number two, he also understands that the Messiah has come through the Jews. So he sends some Jewish friends who happened to be elders in the synagogue to Jesus. And they come to Jesus and they plead with him earnestly. What was their plea? Jesus you need to come and do this number one because he, (that Roman centurion) is worthy. And number two, he loves our nation. Number three, he built our synagogue. Impressive! Definitely a zeal on behalf of these Jewish elders, but also of that Roman centurion. A zeal for God and he had even built their synagogue. But that was all 'I based' or work based.

And as Jesus draws close to his home, with these Jewish friends, elders along with Him; the Roman centurion sent some friends (they're not referred to as Jews so they're probably Romans) gentiles of some sort and this Roman centurion probably got to thinking, if I send the Jews they're going to work from the standpoint of a zeal for God but not one of righteousness. Ignorance of the righteousness of God, ignorant of who Jesus really is. And so he sends some friends with a message to Jesus, "Lord do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof. Notice a big change, "Lord." He calls Jesus Lord, not teacher which is how the Jewish people always referred to Jesus. But Lord, or Master. And how much of a Lord or master? Why, a Roman centurion, occupier of the land, representative of the Roman Empire, I did not presume to come to you.

That takes us back to that sermon we had dealing with Nadab and Abihu; who were going to do it their way when they came to God very American like. And this Roman is saying 'I'm not worthy to come before Jesus.' He has true humility, and a true understanding of who He is. And might I add, he is not ignorant about who Jesus is. Back to the question, how much of Lord? How much of a Master? His message to Jesus; 'just say the word and my servant will be healed.' Why does he say that? For I am a man under authority. I say to my servant, or I say to my soldier go, and they go. You are the Lord, you're the Master, just say the word and whatever this plaguing in my servant will leave him because You're the Master. Jesus's response, 'I tell you not even in Israel have I found such faith.' The elders, his friends, they returned ,and they found the servant healed.

All this took place for us to hear about it here today, and for them to experience it. And who's the "them?" All the world, the nations through whom we are blessed; or through Abraham we are blessed, because the Christ came through his lineage. That Roman centurion, he understood that before the book of Romans was written. He understood that he, a Roman, was grafted in to the trunk of a grapevine, shall we say, because this is how Saint Paul speaks of it. And that trunk was the Jewish people through whom the Messiah came. But he's a different type

of grape, but he's still a grape. He's been grafted in by God to that trunk. But he also realizes he is not greater than the root. And the root is Jesus. He was not worthy. He did not presume that he could do any of this. No, he understood it was a benefit of being grafted into the trunk and receiving the blessings of Jesus who came through that trunk, through the Jewish people. Because he knew that Jesus, the root, could supply everything he needed.

What a beautiful message! A message to Jairus, a Jew, a part of the trunk, who saw Jesus as Lord and master. And to the branch grafted in, the Roman centurion who also by faith, saw Jesus as Lord and Master.

And all this took place for those who have beautiful feet, because they understand we are to preach the good news. Good news that all this took place for their sake. Who's "their?" Everyone, the Jew, the Greek, everyone. May we have beautiful, very beautiful feet. In our Savior's Name, Amen.