



**A SERVICE OF HEALING (FOR THOSE SUFFERING  
EMOTIONAL DISTRESS, GRIEF, DIVORCE, AND PHYSICAL  
AILMENTS)**

**LECTIONARY COMMENTARY**

**Sunday, October 9, 2011**

**Donald Hilliard, Jr., Guest Lectionary Commentator**  
Senior Pastor, Cathedral International, Perth Amboy, NJ

**Lection – Matthew 8:5-13, 16-17** (New Revised Standard Version)

(v. 5) When he entered Capernaum, a centurion came to him, appealing to him (v. 6) and saying, “Lord, my servant is lying at home paralyzed, in terrible distress.” (v. 7) And he said to him, “I

will come and cure him.” (v. 8) The centurion answered, “Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; but only speak the word, and my servant will be healed. (v. 9) For I also am a man under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to one, ‘Go,’ and he goes, and to another, ‘Come,’ and he comes, and to my slave, ‘Do this,’ and the slave does it.” (v. 10) When Jesus heard him, he was amazed and said to those who followed him, “Truly I tell you, in no one in Israel have I found such faith. (v. 11) I tell you, many will come from east and west and will eat with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, (v. 12) while the heirs of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” (v. 13) And to the centurion Jesus said, “Go; let it be done for you according to your faith.” And the servant was healed in that hour. . . .

(v. 16) That evening they brought to him many who were possessed with demons; and he cast out the spirits with a word, and cured all who were sick. (v. 17) This was to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah, “He took our infirmities and bore our diseases.”

## **I. Description of the Liturgical Moment**

The Apostle Paul tells us, “Our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, and against the forces of evil in the heavenly places.”<sup>1</sup> Those who are suffering emotional distress, grief, divorce, and physical ailments all come looking for God’s healing balm to be poured over their wounds. The atmosphere is charged with a spirit of expectancy because so many need so much.

A healing service is also a time of great expectancy and faith. There’s an air of expectancy around what the Lord is going to do. There is an anticipation for a unique manifestation of the Holy Spirit. People are waiting, they are willing, and they are ready to be healed. By faith we are running to the tower of God our strength, or our rock, running to our hope, running believing in the name of Jesus. Lord, we believe. Lord, we trust you. In these faith-filled moments, God stretches out his hands on those who are sick and diseased and releases a miracle.

Healing services at the church where I pastor are marked with prayer, praise, and Holy Spirit power. I believe that God has the power to heal. As beings created in God’s image our bodies belong to him. They do not belong to Satan. They do not belong to the kingdom of darkness. Therefore, sickness and disease cannot reign.

## **II. Biblical Interpretation for Preaching and Worship: Matthew 8:5-13., 16-17**

### **Part One: The Contemporary Contexts of the Interpreter**

In today’s contemporary churches the embracing of the *charismata* (the gifts of the Spirit) is more mainstream than when I first became a pastor. Still, we must learn to participate in our own healing seeking after God first. Come seeking God saying, “Lord I believe, Lord I trust you, Lord I know you can. Lord I know you are able.”<sup>2</sup> Or at least come saying, “Lord I believe, but help my unbelief.” Seeking God is what helped get our fore-parents through slavery and segregation. They knew how to get a prayer through. They knew how to tarry and steadfastly seek God.

Such earnest seeking sets the atmosphere for God. I believe healings and miracles happen easier when the atmosphere is right because miracles do not come through people; they come through God's mercy and grace. So, in an atmosphere of praise and submission to him, God can heal. I've seen God heal. I've seen the Lord over the last 29 years heal the sick. As a youth, I watched God heal people who were weeks from death. I've been in services where people have received miracles. Those closest to my heart have been the recipients of healing. The Lord is still a healer today!

## **Part Two: Biblical Commentary**

Matthew paints an interesting portrait of Jesus in comparison to the other Gospel writers. Matthew in his overwhelmingly Jewish Gospel skillfully paints a portrait of Jesus as one who accepted all people regardless of their position in society.<sup>3</sup> He never implies that Jesus agreed with all people, nonetheless, he accepted all people. In Matthew's Gospel we read about a number of Jesus' miraculous healings. We read about him healing a paralyzed man, a bleeding woman, restoring a young girl to life, healing the blind, bringing peace to despondent minds, and giving speech to the mute. Jesus had a major healing ministry while on earth, and he still heals.

This text specifically concerns one who appeals to Christ for another in his household to be healed. The faith of the one who made the appeal, Jesus said, caused the healing to occur. Jesus honored the centurion's faith on behalf of his servant. Jesus' deed was an act of mercy and deliverance, yes, even for a Roman centurion.<sup>4</sup> Jesus' healing of the centurion's servant was not only a fulfillment of the Scripture in Isaiah where the Messiah, the suffering servant, takes on our infirmities and bears our diseases, but it is also a pure act of grace from a loving God who does not judge based on racial, socio-economic status, or one's physical or mental condition.

Jesus reached out and raised people. It was not enough just to reach out—someone had to be raised too. Some of us are reaching out but we do not want anyone raised, especially if they are “different” than those in our culture, clique, or church. The centurion who came to Jesus was not of the house of Israel. He was a Roman centurion, he represented Israel's oppressor, a heathen even to any lax practicing Jew. He was from the wrong side of the tracks, yet he had enough faith to come to Jesus seeking healing for his servant.

The centurion had a “Yes” in his spirit that bore witness to the “Yes” in Jesus' spirit. Jesus was ready to go and see the paralyzed man in order to cure him. But the centurion did not feel it right to have Jesus in his home. The faith of the centurion was so strong and ran so deep that he told Jesus to just speak the word and it shall be done. By faith, the centurion cooperated with what the Savior was doing. In faith, one not of the house of Israel cooperated with the mission of Christ.

In like fashion, we have to be willing to cooperate with our Savior by faith. By faith, the centurion dared to try Jesus. By now, Jesus has mustered up quite a reputation for himself. People are saying he teaches with authority and he heals the sick. I picture the centurion hearing about this Jesus and immediately he thinks of his suffering servant. So the centurion goes out to search for this Jesus, and when he does, in his words of faith, he dares to see if Jesus is the man he has heard about. The centurion put feet to his faith and tried Jesus. It's noteworthy that the centurion pointed out to Jesus that those under his (the centurion's) control did as he told them to

do. Likewise, the centurion in suggesting that if Jesus just “spoke the word” his servant would be healed, shows that the centurion believes that Jesus has authority over all healing. What about those of us who belong to Jesus (who are under his control)? How much more are we to do as he says and believe him for healing?

Lastly, the centurion inspires us because he dared to believe that healing was possible at just the proclamation of it by Jesus. There were stories of all that Jesus was doing and teaching. Surely word has gotten out that some found him problematic and wanted him gone altogether. In spite of this the centurion had made up his mind that Jesus could heal his servant. There was nothing that entered his mind that said, “Well maybe Jesus does not have it today.” He was steadfast about his faith that this could happen and that Jesus was the man for the job. Jesus spoke a word to the servant’s situation and in that moment the servant’s situation changed from sickness to life and life more abundantly.

### **Celebration**

Jesus said, “Go and let it be done according to your faith.” Faith is a tool in the hands of Jesus. It was because of one individual’s faith that not only his own servant received healing that very hour, but many who were possessed with demons received healing. Jesus can speak one word because of one person’s faith and completely turn whole worlds upside down. Jesus still has the authority to heal those with emotional distress and grief and those suffering because of divorce and physical ailments. Faith does not fail. It’s always a believer’s market. It is not a seller’s market. It is not a buyer’s market. It’s a believer’s market because Jesus accepts faith wherever it is found and he heals.

### **Descriptive Details**

The descriptive details of this passage include:

**Sights:** A non-Jew conversing with Jesus; the paralyzed servant; Jesus taking our infirmities and bearing our diseases; heirs of the Kingdom being thrown into darkness; Jesus casting out demons in the evening; Jesus curing those sick with a variety of ailments with just a word;

**Sounds:** Jesus and the centurion talking; the centurion giving orders to those under his charge; Jesus exclaiming to those who followed that he had never seen such great faith; weeping and gnashing of teeth; the footsteps of the centurion as he walked away from Jesus, being told his servant was healed; the sounds uttered by those possessed of demons; the moans and cries of the sick; the sounds of joy by those healed by Jesus; and

**Colors:** The colors worn by the centurion who came to Jesus; the color of outer darkness; the pale faces of those who were ill; and the rosy cheeks of the ill and demon-possessed after they were healed.

### **Notes**

1. Ephesians 6:12, RSV.

2. Hilliard, Donald. Be Healed! The Declaration. (2 volume CD)

3. Matthew was writing to Jewish Christians in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century BCE. Therefore, his writing has a number of Old Testament references that a Jewish reader would have no problem picking up on.

4. Boring, Eugene and Fred Craddock. The People's New Testament Commentary. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010.