

Homily for Friday in the Fourth Week after Pentecost

June 26, 2020

By the Reverend Stephen Gerth

Year 2, Proper 7: 2 Kings 24:20b–25:12*; Psalm 137:1–6; Matthew 8:1–4

Yesterday’s gospel lesson were the last verses of the Sermon on the Mount. Matthew’s gospel continues with today’s lesson, Jesus coming down from the mountain, followed by the crowds and his disciples. His teaching has captured the hearts of those who have heard him. He now turns to another sign of his sovereign power, the power of heaven, that is, the power to heal. It begins with the most outcast of outcasts, a leper.

Matthew writes, “And behold, a leper, having come near, was prostrating himself to Jesus”—that is “worshiping” Jesus. In the New Testament, worship is not just an action of one’s heart and mind, but of one’s body.¹ While lying flat on his face on the ground, the man says, ‘Lord, if you are willing, you have the power to cleanse me.’ ”² He is the first person in this gospel to address Jesus as “Lord.”

¹ Andrew B. McGowan, *Ancient Christian Worship: Early Church Practices in Social, Historical, and Theological Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 6–7.

² Matthew 8:2. My translation following the RSV.

Kavin Rowe, who teaches New Testament at Duke Divinity School, has argued for understanding the use of the word *kyrie*—“Lord”—in Luke, following the Septuagint, the Greek version of the Hebrew Bible dating from the third century BC³—as meaning being a translation of the sacred name “Y-H-W-H.”⁴

In a footnote on the use of this *kyrie* in Matthew, Ulrich Luz writes, “As early as John Chrysostom”—the bishop of Constantinople who died in the year 407—“it was noticed that the leper did not say to the Lord, “If you ask God . . . you can make me clean.”⁵ Luz writes also, that in Matthew, only Jesus’ disciples and those who come to be healed address Jesus as Lord.⁶ Tomorrow at Mass we will hear of two more healings. Jesus will be addressed Lord.⁷

Finally, Luz closes his comments on this first healing by posing the question, “Is there an overlooked potential meaning of our story here that might be

³ *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 2ed. (New York: Oxford University Press 1978), s.v. “Septuagint,” 1260.

⁴ C. Kavin Rowe, “Luke and the Trinity: An Essay in Ecclesial Biblical Theology,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 56 (2003), 1–26.

⁵ Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 8–20: A Commentary*, trans. James E. Crouch, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2001), 6 n.11.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁷ Luke 8:8.

mined for today, in the aftermath of the Holocaust?”⁸

Matthew’s Jesus begins with a commitment and mission to Israel. Thus, he tells the man he healed, “Go, show yourself, to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a proof to the people.”⁹

You may remember that one of the themes of this gospel is the “unraveling”—to use Luz’s word—of the relationship between Jewish and Gentile Christians and Jews.¹⁰

Finally, a word about another footnote, one in the late Raymond Brown’s last book, *An Introduction to the New Testament*. In it he points out that English uses the word “miracle,” from the Latin meaning “to wonder” at something, *mirari*, to translate the Greek word *dynameis*—from which we get dynamite. Miracles aren’t Godly magic for the evangelists; they are acts of power, acts of the Lord, acts of the God of Israel.¹¹

✠ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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⁸ Luz, 7.

⁹ Matthew 8:4.

¹⁰ Luz, 7.

¹¹ Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 133, n.16.