

The Fourth Day of Lent: Saturday

February 20, 2021

By the Reverend Stephen Gerth

Isaiah 58:9b–14; Psalm 86:1–11; Ezekiel 33:11; Luke 5:27–32

In his commentary on Luke’s gospel, Professor Luke Timothy Johnson writes that Jesus is describing himself as doctor, sickness as sin, and righteousness as health.¹ In the New Testament, the Greek word translated as “righteousness” is, and here I quote from *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, “almost always used in the New Testament for the right conduct of man which follows the will of God and is pleasing to Him.”² In other words, someone who knows God and is in relationship with God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Mark identifies Levi in his second chapter as Levi the son of Alphaeus, but in the list of disciples in Mark’s next chapter, there is no Levi. Instead, there is a James the son of Alphaeus.³ Mark, Matthew, Luke, and Acts, the first nine names in each list, are the same.⁴ Levi is a wealthy tax collector who “left everything and followed [Jesus].”⁵ Next, Levi welcomes Jesus and his disciples to a great feast in his house. But we hear no more about this tax collector in the New Testament.

To keep things confusing, the evangelist we call Matthew alone identifies the tax collector not as Levi but as Matthew—in the story itself and his list of the twelve.

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¹ Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, Sacra Pagina (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1991), 97.

² Gottlob Schrenk, “δικαιοσύνη, in the non-Pauline Writings of the NT,” *Theological Dictionary of New Testament*, ed. G. Kittel, trans. and ed. G.W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1964–1976), II:198.

³ Mark 3:18.

⁴ Mark 3:13–19a; Matthew 10:1–4; Luke 6:12–16; Acts 1:13.

⁵ Luke 5:28.

read three of her books. My favorite is *Written That You May Believe: Encountering Jesus in the Fourth Gospel*.⁶ Early in this book, she draws our attention to the last words, and almost certainly the original ending of John; “Jesus said to [Thomas], ‘Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.’ Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name.’ ”⁷

Of all the New Testament books, none is a greater witness to Jesus Christ revealing himself in words as he did in-person to those who encountered him when he was alive. The Holy Spirit led men—and perhaps women too—to write so that we would meet the Risen Jesus, the Word made flesh, in the words of Scripture. Jesus is the physician. Sin is the sickness. Health is following God’s will for our lives.

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

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⁶ Sandra M. Schneiders, *Written That You May Believe: Encountering Jesus in the Fourth Gospel*, 2nd ed. (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 2003).

⁷ John 20:29–31.