

Thanksgiving Day

Text: 2 Chronicles 7:14 (NIV) ¹⁴if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

Text: Heal our Land

This year our nation commemorates two occasions when our country was broken. 150 years ago we were engulfed in the Civil War. The Battle in Gettysburg occurred from July 1-3, 1863. In those three days 50,000 men died in battle. On November 19, 1863 Abraham Lincoln came to the dedication of the cemetery to make a few remarks. It was a time when this country was broken in two.

The time capsule of our cornerstone contains a few newspapers from early November 1963. I remember reading them when we opened it for the 50th anniversary of the congregation. There were several articles with regard to Kennedy's foreign policy plans. It was rather eerie because of course no one realized that within a few weeks, he would be dead. On November 22, 1963 he was shot by Lee Harvey Oswald in Dallas. It is a day that will never be forgotten by those who experienced it. Our entire country was in deep mourning.

As a nation we have so many blessings that we can be thankful for. This year we were again blessed with an abundance. But in many ways our country is broken into many pieces today. Just say any of these words: Obama, Obamacare, Stott Walker or Act 10, and if the person you are speaking with is of a different opinion, you might be in for a big argument. Closer to home, we sometimes look forward to seeing our family on the holidays, but sometimes our families are broken, and we dread the times when we get together. There are so many troubles in our country and in our world today, but in this text God promises to bring healing. In this chapter Solomon prayed at the consecration of the temple, that God would hear the prayers of His people. Our text is God's answer that He will hear and heal our land.

I. There are certain things which God wants from His people.

Notice that He does not want these things from any people. He wants them from **His** people. The verse says, "*If My people, who are called by My name...*" God's name was put on the people of Israel when the priests spoke the Benediction. Numbers 6:23-27 says, "*Tell Aaron and his sons, 'This is how you are to bless the Israelites. Say to them, 'The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make His face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace.' So they will put My name on the Israelites, and I will bless them.'*" God's name was put on the Israelites in the Benediction. When was God's name put on us? It is when we are baptized into the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In Holy Baptism we are the people of God, who are called by His name. Through faith in Christ, we are God's people.

There are four things that He asks of His people when we and our land need healing. It says, "*If My people...will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways.*" You can see each of these things in today's Gospel lesson also. (The Healing of the 10 Lepers)

God calls us to **humble ourselves**. The 10 lepers cried out to Jesus from a distance. They humbled themselves before Him. One verse that appears in a number of places throughout the Bible is, “*God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble*.” Humility is not a popular attribute today. It doesn’t get you noticed by people in the world. You have to make some noise. You have to talk yourself up. You have to showboat. But that is not how we get noticed before God. He tells us to humble ourselves under His might hand, that He can raise us up.

The second things that God asks of His people is that we **pray**. The temple which Solomon built was to be a house of prayer. The lepers, who came to Jesus, prayed for their healing. God wants us to bring our petition to Him. When your family needs healing, pray. When you need healing, pray. Where our nation needs healing, pray. Bring your needs to God in prayer. We have the privilege as the people of God that we can pray in Jesus’ name. Because of that we are certain that God does hear us and answers all of our prayers. Along with your petitions, don’t forget to thank God for the blessings that He has given to you. It’s easy to forget to thank God. After Jesus healed them, 9 of the former lepers kept going. Only one returned to give thanks. Thanksgiving is an important for us. It helps us to remember that if God helped us in the past, He will help us now and in the future too.

God calls on His people to **seek His face**. This concept is a bit foreign to us, but we see it throughout the Old Testament. For instance, 1 Chronicles 16:11 says, “*Look to the Lord and His strength; seek His face always.*” The Benediction mentions God’s face twice, It says, “The Lord lift up His face upon you... The Lord turn His face toward you.” When God looks on us, He blesses us. The 10 lepers sought Jesus’ face. When they saw Him, they cried out, “*Jesus master have pity on us.*” As Christians we do not seek to be blessed by our wisdom and strength. We don’t look to the things of this world for help. Our help is in the name of the Lord. We seek Him, His help, His strength, and His salvation.

Finally, God desires that His people **turn from their wicked ways**. The Hebrew word for “turn” is often translated as “repent.” God desires that His people repent of their sins. It is tempting to blame other people for the messes in our country today. We think that if there were not so many immoral people, things would be better. We are tempted to blame our spouses, children, and others in the family when our families are broken. We want to say that the healing we need must be someone else’s fault. The pharisees in Jesus’ day thought that. They thought that if everyone were like them, God would bless Israel. It was because of the sins of other people that they believed that God was withholding His blessings. However, God calls on **HIS** people to turn from their wicked ways. He calls on us to examine our lives, to confess our sins, and to seek His forgiveness.

For the healing of our land, God calls on those who belong to Him to humble themselves, pray, seek His face, and turn from their sins.

II. God promises to do three things to heal us.

It says in the 2nd half of our text, “then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.”

He will hear. There are many examples of how God heard the prayers that were offered in the temple. Jesus heard the plea of the 10 lepers. He promises that He will hear every prayer that is offered in His name. He not only hears our prayer. He answers them in a way that is best for us.

He will forgive our sins. The temple was the place where the sacrifices were offered for the forgiveness of the people's sins. Those sacrifices pointed to the sacrifice which would take away all the sins of the world when Jesus gave His life for us on the cross. When we humbly come before our Lord's face confessing our sins, He will not turn His face from us. He forgives us all of our sins. It is amazing that we spend so much time trying to cover up our sins or denying them when God promises to forgive them all because Jesus has already paid for them all.

He will heal our land. Throughout the Old Testament it was God who healed Israel whenever they were in need. He gave them manna in the desert. He saved them from enemies. He brought them back from exile. Eventually He sent the Savior which He promised them. In today's Gospel lesson, Jesus also brought healing to the 10 lepers. Today it is also God alone who can bring true healing to our land, our lives, and our families. We can look back and remember many times when He healed us in the past. We are certain that He will have mercy on His people, and He will give healing where we need it today.

This verse shows what God expects from His people, and what He promises to give to us. He expects humility, prayer, that we seek Him, and repentance. He promises to hear, forgive, and heal. May His Holy Spirit enable us to seek Him always, that our land and our lives may receive the healing that only He can give. Then we will be able to look back and say about another of His mighty deeds, "Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good. His mercy endures forever." Amen.

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