

## **Commentary on the Gospel for Thu, Jan 11th 2018**

The opening chapters of 1 Samuel provide background for the life of this great Hebrew judge and prophet. Israel is at war with its neighbors, there is corruption in the priestly class, and the elderly judge Eli is powerless to prevent the oncoming collapse that he is told will transpire. In two battles Israel suffers over 34,000 dead and loses the ark of God. Eli himself dies when he hears of the death of his two sons. If not written specifically for this state of affairs, the psalm response for today certainly is appropriate – God has “cast off” the people and let them be driven back by their foes. No wonder the psalmist beseeches God to “Redeem us.”

Just as the people felt abandoned, the poor leper, shunned by his community because of his skin disease, felt powerless. But he recognized a power in Jesus to help him. And so the leper asked Jesus to redeem him by making him clean, to wash away his skin sores that he might be more acceptable. And so Jesus cured him. Jesus removed the stain of the leprosy and made the man clean. Jesus redeemed him.

Perhaps another way to look at these scriptures is to focus on the faith of the participants. In Samuel, the elders of Israel thought that bringing the ark into battle would insure their success. As an article in the December, 2007 issue of Smithsonian magazine discusses, the ark was reputed to have tremendous power, since it was an earthly manifestation of God. The Philistines were frightened of the power of the ark, and inspired to fight beyond their normal capabilities. But if the ark was so powerful, why were the Hebrews not successful in this battle against the Philistines? Did they forget that the power of the ark was directly related to their faithfulness to God’s call to them, that for the ark to be their protector, they in turn needed to surrender themselves to God’s will?

If so, then consider the leper. He surrenders himself to Jesus, and by his actions and words, says “I believe in you and your power over me. I trust you implicitly with my needs. I know you can help me, and I ask for that help. I surrender myself to you. You are my hope, my cleanser, my redeemer. Please cure me of the stain that covers me.” And so Jesus cures him.

Is your faith like that of the Hebrews, or of the leper? Do you believe that you will be redeemed by trusting in manifestations of God’s power, or do you believe that you will be redeemed by surrendering your self, your will, your entire being to the will of God? My prayer for today is that I can fully, unconditionally, and generously surrender myself to God

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