

July 22, 2007, Liturgical Year C  
**ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S CHURCH IN THE TOWN OF TONAWANDA, NY**  
The Rev. Fr. Arthur W. Ward, Jr. + Rector

*"The Road to Recovery"*

**WELCOME TO RR&R!**

I would like to welcome everyone to our 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual *Rock, Rods, and Relationships* Event here at St. Bartholomew's. It's great that you have come to join us for the fellowship, the food, and of course for the cars. But we have also have gathered to worship the Lord, to hear His Word and to celebrate His promises. And we come to seek healing for our bodies, minds and souls.

**JESUS IS THE ANSWER**

You see the truth is we live in a world desperate for God's healing. There is tragedy and turmoil, discord and division, sadness and sorrow. And on top of it all, life seemingly ends in death. But there is an answer. The answer is the Lord Jesus Christ. We heard from **Hebrews 1:1**: ***"long ago God has spoken to our world in many and various ways through His prophets, but in these last days, He has spoken to us through His Son."***

Notice what else is said? ***"Whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power."***

And not only is Jesus higher than the angels, but the angels of God worship Him! (**Heb. 11:6**). That's why Jesus isn't just a great prophet, teacher or sage. He is worthy to be worshipped. He is God in human flesh. As You can't worship another god, and that is why Jesus says I and the Father are One.

And Jesus promised us another comforter - The Holy Spirit. Don't think God is far away. Don't think that God just walked the earth two thousand years ago. When we acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord, the Holy Spirit (the Spirit of Jesus) enters our hearts. And that means God is right here, right now, not only in our midst, but in our hearts.

Now "to heal" means to restore that which is broken, to mend that which has been torn, to make whole that which is incomplete. And we have already talked about how our world is broken, torn and incomplete. That's exactly why Jesus came to our world. To heal our relationship with God, with others, and to heal our bodies, minds and souls. The truth is life is a journey. And there are only two roads to choose from – the road of life without God, which leads to death, and the road of life with God which leads to recovery. So how to get on the road to recovery? And how do we stay on that road? There are four keys found in our lesson from St. Matthew. Please turn now to **Matthew 9:18-39**.

**FAITH**

Here Matthew is highlighting a number of the healings performed by Jesus during His earthly ministry. An official from the synagogue comes to Jesus requesting that He come to heal his daughter who had just died. As Jesus makes his way to the official's house a woman who had been experiencing a hemorrhage for twelve years moves through the crowd thinking that if she could only touch Jesus' cloak

she could be healed. As she touches the cloak, the power of Jesus heals here. Jesus upon seeing the woman, tells her, ***“Your faith has made you well.”***

Do you want to be on the road to recovery? It all begins with faith. That’s the first key. Faith is not just a belief, it is trust. It’s not believing for the sake of believing, it’s trusting someone you can trust. When my wife and I go on a trip or are away for a day we sometimes leave our children with my parents. I can’t see what or how they are watching our kids, but I trust them. I have faith that they will do a good job taking care of them even though I can’t see it being done. That’s faith. Trusting even when you can’t physically see it.

I’ll tell you what else faith is. Faith is trusting even when you don’t understand everything. We can’t understand all that God is doing. We can’t understand why certain things happen the way they do. But we are called to trust God nonetheless. That’s why somebody once said, “I don’t understand electricity, but I’m not going to sit in the dark until I do.” We walk by faith, not by sight. **Hebrews 11:3** says that , ***“Without faith it is impossible to please God, for whoever seeks to come to God, must believe that He exists and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.”***

Faith is so important that it is mentioned more than any other spiritual attribute, or virtue in the New Testament, even more than love. Why? You can’t love God unless you first believe in Him! You won’t even get to first base in the road to recovery unless you have faith. And we aren’t just talking about a saving faith. A faith believes God every day despite that the world does and says.

But how can we do that? How do we keep the faith? It’s called hope. You’ve got to have hope in this life. Do you know why people get depressed? They have a feeling of helplessness and hopelessness. Do you want to kill the soul? Take away hope. Faith and hope go side by side. That’s why we are told in **Hebrews 11:1** that ***“Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”***

## **HOPE**

We’ve already talked about how faith is being certain of things not seen – things we can’t see or fully understand. But what about hope? Why does it go hand in hand with faith? Well, let me just say first off, what hope is not. It is not some kind of wishful thinking, like we hope it is going to happen. The hope the Bible talks about is sure it is certain. It is more sure than the sun and the moon and the stars. It refers to what God will do in the future.

Do you know how we are able to keep believing? It is knowing that a better day is coming. It’s knowing that there is a light at the end of the tunnel. That God is going to do a new thing. That’s hope. Not a wishful thinking. But knowing that things are going to get better because God says they’re going to get better.

Remember Jairus? He is the official from the synagogue Matthew refers to in our Gospel lesson. We know this because a more detailed account is given in Mark and Luke. His only daughter was sick and near death. And he came to Jesus to ask the Lord to heal his daughter. And as Jesus was on his way, another person came from Jarius’ house to report that his daughter had died and not to bother Jesus any more. But what did Jesus tell Jairus? We have it recorded in Mark’s and Luke’s Gospels. Jesus said, ***“Don’t be afraid, just believe.”*** Literally the words, “just believe” mean “keep on believing.” Here is Jairus and he’s just got word that his only daughter has died.

Do you know what must have been going through Jairus' mind upon hearing that his daughter had died? The flood of emotion – he could have let himself go down the road of despair. But Jesus says, **“Jairus, keep believing.”**

When Jesus arrived and said the girl was not dead, only asleep, the people mourning laughed. Many in our world laugh and sneer when we talk about the hope of God. But what happened? Jairus trusted the Lord and the Lord healed his daughter.

How do we get through the tough times, through the trials of life? We do it by remembering the hope we have in Jesus Christ. St. Paul says in **Romans 8:18**, **“For I consider that the present sufferings of this age can't be compared to the glory that shall be revealed to us.”** That's the future friends. That's the hope we have. God has a wonderful future in store for those who place their faith in Him.

### **RIGHTEOUSNESS**

But let me tell you what else is just as important. Not just faith and hope, but righteousness. That's the third key. What' righteousness? It's having a pure heart and doing the right thing no matter what. God is a righteous God. Jesus came to restore all righteousness. He did it with the cross. What did we read in **Hebrews 1:3** – **He made purification for sins.** That's a reference to Jesus' death on the cross.

We are all sinners, every one of us. We've made a mess of our lives, we've made a mess of this world. And until we recognize that we are sinners, we won't be on the road to recovery. Do you remember what happened in the next account of healing written in Matthew? Two blind beggars on the roadside. What did they say? **“Have mercy on us!”**

You only need mercy if you don't deserve mercy. The blind men could have complained to the Lord and said, “Lord, why did you make us this way?” or “Why did you let us become blind?” But they didn't they said, **“Have mercy on us, Son of David.”** In other words, we need you, Lord. We need you to get us out of this mess. We are unworthy. We need you to heal us and to make us right. And God responds by showing us mercy. He forgives us not so that we can go our own way but that we can start afresh and do what God created us to do – and that is do what is good, right, and pleasing to the Lord. Jesus came not only to die on the cross for our sins, but to enable us to be truly righteous.

### **LOVE**

And that leads us to the fourth and final key that binds the other three together, and that is love. We can have faith, we can have hope, we can have another chance to do what is right, because God love us. And He has shown us that love in Jesus Christ. Jesus said, **“Greater love has no one than this than one who lays down his life for his friends.” (Jn. 15:13).**

Why did Christ care? Why did He have compassion for the multitudes as we read in **Matthew 9:36**? Because of His love. He loves us too much to let us stay on the broad road that leads to death.

Psychologists tell us that people need three things in life – someone to love, something to do, and something to look forward to. Well, that's true, but they are missing something. We all need someone to love us. And it is God who loves us first. In fact **1 Jn. 4:19** says, **“that we love because God first loved us.”** And that love is shown in Jesus Christ (**Rom. 5:8**).

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The Road to Recovery begins and ends with the love of God in Christ Jesus.

Do you want to be healed? Then put your faith in the Living God, rest in the hope that God has given us in Christ, do what is right, and always remember that the Lord loves you unconditionally.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, AMEN!