**16th Sunday after Pentecost – Year B – September 16, 2012 – Faith Lutheran Church, Radcliff, KY**

**Based on Acts 3:1-10 written by Pastor Paul Horn**

**“Jesus Delivers us from Suffering”**

*One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer—at three in the afternoon. 2 Now a man crippled from birth was being carried to the temple gate called Beautiful, where he was put every day to beg from those going into the temple courts. 3 When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money. 4 Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, “Look at us!” 5 So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them. 6 Then Peter said, “Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.” 7 Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man’s feet and ankles became strong. 8 He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God. 9 When all the people saw him walking and praising God, 10 they recognized him as the same man who used to sit begging at the temple gate called Beautiful, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him. (Acts 3:1-10)*

“Pastor Horn, what do you do at these pastors’ conferences that you attend?” This past Sunday I traveled to Round Lake Park, a suburb of Chicago. I and 40 other pastors gathered at St. Paul Lutheran Church, where we held our own worship service. One of the pastors from our conference delivered the sermon. An offering was gathered and later in the day we voted to send that money to one of our mission congregations in Indiana. Eight months ago four doctrinal papers were assigned to four different pastors. At our conference they read their papers word-for-word, usually 20pages or less, and then we discussed the papers. These papers are assigned to ensure that our pastors continue to remain true to the doctrinal purity in our synod and on the other hand it serves as continuing education for pastors. The theme of the conference focused on the 7th petition of the Lord’s Prayer, “Deliver us from evil.”

Martin Luther in his *Large Catechism* wrote about this petition, “But there is nevertheless also included whatever evil may happen to us under the devil's kingdom - poverty, shame, death, and, in short, all the agonizing misery and heartache of which there is such an unnumbered multitude on the earth. For since the devil is not only a liar, but also a murderer, he constantly seeks our life, and wreaks his anger whenever he can afflict our bodies with misfortune and harm. Hence it comes that he often breaks men's necks or drives them to insanity, drowns some, and incites many to commit suicide, and to many other terrible calamities.” (Martin Luther’s *Large Catechism*, paragraph 115)

When Martin Luther wrote that Satan constantly seeks our life, he means us Christians, God’s people. Satan has even more reason to bring evil to those who proclaim the gospel, doesn’t he? They pose as a huge threat to his mission to stop the advance of God’s kingdom and to drag as many souls to hell with him as he can. He certainly has brought evil to the pastors in our conference. Pastor Lon Kuether suffered from legionnaires disease this past year and almost died. Pastor Paul Jansen was stricken with cancer 12 years ago, lost one of his legs because of it, and now walks with a prosthesis. Pastor George Ferch suffered from an intestinal disease that almost killed him 8years ago. Pastor Tom Schultz was absent from our conference last week so that he could stand beside his wife Valerie as she underwent another round of chemotherapy. Your own pastor recently discovered through tests that he has a genetic disorder that predisposes him to stroke and clotting of the blood.

These men have devoted their lives to preach and teach the gospel, to shepherd souls, to bring them life through the Word of God. And so Satan inflicts evil on them. Why? Why does God even allow this? What purpose does this serve? Why doesn’t God heal these men immediately?

Our lesson this morning is from Acts chapter 3. Ten days after Jesus’ ascension was the Day of Pentecost. On that special day the Holy Spirit filled the disciples with special gifts. He enabled them to preach boldly, to speak in foreign languages, and gave them miraculous powers to heal the sick, raise the dead, and drive out demons. These powers confirmed their authority as Jesus’ apostles, and proved their words about Jesus were true.

Since the Day of Pentecost believers in Jesus gathered daily in the temple courts for worship, to celebrate the Lord’s Supper, to pray and to teach others about Jesus. One day the Apostles Peter and John were walking to the temple. They walked right by a man who was laid near one of the gates to the temple. This man was crippled from birth, we know that he was over 40 years old (Acts 4:22). He probably had family members or friends who were kind enough to carry him to the gate so he could beg.

How many times had Peter and John walked past that man? How many other crippled and diseased lay there with him? For reasons only known to God, on this particular day Peter and John stopped. The men both looked right at the crippled beggar and Peter said, “Look at us!” Of course the man will pay attention because he’s expecting money. The man certainly was not expecting the greater gift they gave him. There was no hope of a cure for the paralysis in his feet and ankles. But what joy that man expressed when Jesus, working through his Apostles, gave that man a gift worth more than gold and silver!

Why hadn’t he been healed prior to that day? Certainly he had been a permanent fixture for many years. It’s not inconceivable to think that even Jesus had walked past this man on his way into the temple. Why the wait? Why did Jesus allow this man to suffer more than he needed to?

Imagine the thoughts in this man’s heart. “What kind of life is this? I’m a burden on society, a burden on my family and friends, I can’t work, I serve no purpose. Why, Lord, why?” Perhaps you’ve asked those same questions for yourself. If not, you asked them on behalf of a loved one or a friend.

Even as Christians we challenge the wisdom and love and compassion of God. “If you are a loving God, then you shouldn’t allow misery to come to me in the first place. Then you should take away my suffering because you want me to happy, don’t you? If I’m suffering then I can’t perform my duties as a husband, wife, parent, student, employer, a church member. I have no purpose in life.”

God comes back and answers, “But I do love you, and I make all things work for your good.” (Rom 8.28) And we answer right back, “Really? ‘For my good’? Because I don’t see this going anywhere good for me or my family.” God comes back and answers with this passage from our Verse of the Day, “Rejoice in the Lord always, I will say it again, rejoice!” (Phil 4:4) Rejoice always? Even in suffering and pain? That’s the craziest thing I’ve ever heard. How can I do that? Why doesn’t God heal me like he did with the man in the story? Why doesn’t he heal my loved one? Or at least take my loved one home now because they’re suffering? Why does this have to happen to me? I’ve suffered enough already. Why can’t he stop Satan from bringing evil to me?

The fact is that it’s not just Satan who brings evil to our bodies. "**You must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die,**" God told Adam. "**You will not surely die**," Satan told Eve. They ate. Satan lied. In a flash, immortal Adam and Eve became mortal. Mortal is a polite word to describe the process whereby the “sin cell” begins to creep through our tissues and veins, causing sickness, disease, suffering and finally death. This virus of sin is contracted from the very moment of our conception. Our suffering is not God’s fault, but our own fault as a human race. We brought sin into the world through our disobedience to God.

Sin not afflicts our bodies but our souls as well. Sin is what causes us to question God, to be angry with God, to doubt God and his love for us. That’s where Satan wants us to be, to reject God, give up all hope, to believe that God doesn’t love me. Then Satan wins. We lose everything. We continue to cry out, “Why dear God?”

The answer is God on the cross crying, “Why? Why Father?” “Why, Son? Because I love them.” It’s like a father who brings his son into the emergency room, his toddler son who has fallen and has a nasty cut right next to his eye, and the father knows he needs stitches, but the boy won’t hold still for the doctor to inject the local anesthetic before he stitches the wound, and so the little writhing body is held down, and his arms and legs and head are strapped down, with tears in his eyes he looks at his father horrified, “Why, daddy? Why are you letting them do this to me?” “Because I love you… it’s for your good son, so the doctor can help you.”

There he is nailed down to the cross crying for the whole world, “Why Father, do you forsake me?” “It’s for the good of these people, who are infected with sin, who are dying in their bodies and their souls, and unless you provide a cure for their sickness, they will perish forever.” This is the love the Father has for you, that he would cause his own Son to carry our anxieties and anger and doubt and hopelessness and despair, and then to die with those sins, our sins.

Jesus has done what no chemotherapy, radiation or wonder drug could ever do. By his death Jesus has removed the curse of sin from your body and soul. Although sin will have its way with my body and I will grow old and die. Death is not the end for me or for you. Your soul will go to live with Christ. And Jesus stands on the other side of the grave beaming at us and saying, “Don’t be afraid!” On that day Jesus will raise our bodies and reunite them with our souls and rid us of this awful disease once and for all. He will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body: designed to be healthy and free from sickness and disease – a body that will never be corrupt and die – but live forever.

Legs that will never grow weary of dancing and jumping, like the man from our story. Notice that once this man is healed he doesn’t criticize or complain to God, “Well, it’s about time! What took you so long?” He forgets the past 40 years of what seemed to be a waste of a life, and thinks only about how he can thank his Great Physician and Savior. Not only did he have a new life with new legs, but this man possessed a greater gift, the gift of a new life in Christ. And now he had strong feet and ankles to go and tell everyone about how Jesus healed not only his body, but more importantly, his soul.

This is why Christians suffer – so that when the Great Physician places his healing hand on us, we praise God and everyone hears about it. When sickness is kept away (when test results come back favorable )– we praise God, and everyone hears about it. When the results come back and they are not so favorable, we still praise God. When we continue to suffer – we still praise God. Why? So that everyone hears about. But why I still praise him when he allows me to continue in my suffering and pain?

I praise him because has compassion on me and loves me enough to give me a new life in Christ. I praise because in my new life in Christ I have hope, a sure and certain hope of eternal life in heaven. I praise him because in my new life in Christ he gives me the strength to persevere in sufferings and hardships. He gives me patience, he preserves my faith and will not let Satan snatch me away from him. And I will praise for that. And the world will see it and hear it – the nurses, doctors, other patients in the hospital room, my friends and family, my coworkers. They will hear how great and powerful my God is through my suffering and weakness.

This is why a Christian suffers – to be reminded that I am not home yet. And I won’t be home until my feet touch the green pastures of heaven. And if that is when Jesus decides my suffering will end, then so be it. I will still praise and thank him who knows me, who deals compassionately with me, whose grace is sufficient for me (2Cor 12:9). I will praise him because he delivers me from suffering. Amen.