

The First Sunday after Michaelmas (Trinity 19)
St. Matthew 9:1-8: "Healing for Hidden Hurts"
October 6/7, 2018 | Saude, Jerico, & Redeemer Lutheran Churches

In Nomine Iesu

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Hear us, O Lord, as we come to You burdened with our guilt, and bow in faith at Your feet. Speak to us Your word of absolution; say to our souls, "Your sins be forgiven You"; that with good courage we may rise up and go forth to serve You, now and all our days, to the glory of Your holy name. Amen. (*Parish Prayers*, ed. Frank Colquhoun, p. 125)

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. (Rom. 1:7, etc.)

The sermon text for today is taken from the ninth chapter of the Gospel according to St. Matthew. We read selected verses in Jesus' name:

And getting into a boat [Jesus] crossed over and came to His own city. And behold, some people brought to Him a paralytic, lying on a bed. And when Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, "Take heart, My son; your sins are forgiven." / And behold, some of the scribes said to themselves, "This man is blaspheming." / But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, "Why do you think evil in your hearts? For which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise and walk'? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins" – He then said to the paralytic – "Rise, pick up your bed and go home." And he rose and went home. When the crowds saw it, they were afraid, and they glorified God, who had given such authority to men. ^(ESV)

These are Your words, heavenly Father. Sanctify us by Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen. (Jn. 17:17)

In Christ Jesus, who came as the Physician for the spiritually sick (Mt. 9:12), dear fellow redeemed:

The account of the healing of the paralytic is recorded in three of the four Gospels – Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Both Mark and Luke offer the interesting detail that when the friends of the paralytic could not get into the house where Jesus was teaching, they opened up a hole in the roof. Then they let down their friend on his bed before Jesus. This would have been something to witness! If you were in the house, you would have wondered what was going on when pieces of the roof rained down, beams of light cut into the room, and faces peered down from above.

As striking as this experience must have been, Matthew says nothing about it. All he says is that some people brought their paralyzed friend to Jesus. This shows us that how the paralytic was brought to Jesus is not the most important detail. The most important details are what happened when he was set before Jesus.

I

Now what was this young man's most pressing need? No one could fail to see the sad condition he was in. He was paralyzed. He could not walk. Perhaps he could not even move his arms. The

friends of this person went to the great trouble of hoisting him up on the roof and lowering him down before Jesus. What were they expecting Jesus to do? Jesus recognized the young man's most pressing need. *"Take heart, My son"* He said; *"your sins are forgiven."*

If you were in the position of the paralyzed man, would you have been disappointed about what Jesus said? Would you have been perplexed that Jesus seemed to ignore your paralysis? But the paralyzed man did not protest. Maybe his paralysis was not what troubled him the most.

Can you imagine a scenario in which no physical pain is worse than the spiritual turmoil of your heart and soul? What if this man struggled with serious depression and had lost the will to live? What if he had become paralyzed by doing something foolish, and he carried a great burden of guilt for his actions? What if he worried that God was punishing him for past sins by making him paralyzed? If any of these were true, he would have seen his paralysis as a symptom of a much deeper problem, a problem which seemed to have no solution.

But then Jesus spoke. His words brought calm to the inner sea of turmoil. It cast beams of healing light into the paralytic's troubled heart. He was not yet able to rise from his bed, but his spirit was lifted up. He was comforted. How do we know Jesus' Word had this effect? There was no change that could be observed in the paralytic, unless a once troubled countenance now showed signs of relief and peacefulness. The scribes, for their part, denied that the young man's sins had been forgiven. They said within themselves, *"Why does this man speak like that? He is blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?"* (Mk. 2:7).

Their assumption was that Jesus was not God. That assumption was about to be challenged. Jesus knew their thoughts. He said to them, *"Why do you think evil in your hearts? For which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise and walk'?"* What is the answer? You and I can easily say both things, but we do not have the power to make either of them happen. Jesus has the power to do both, and He proved the power to give spiritual healing by giving physical healing.

As proof *"that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins,"* Jesus said to the paralytic, *"Rise, pick up your bed and go home."* Now if the man could not stand up, what would it mean? That his sins were not forgiven. But the second miracle was proof of the first. He did get up. His sins were forgiven. And all because of Jesus' powerful Word.

II

We said earlier that Matthew did not include the detail of how the paralyzed man was brought before Jesus. But Matthew did include a detail that Mark and Luke did not. At the end of this account, Matthew wrote that the crowds *"glorified God, who had given such authority to men."* That is an interesting conclusion for the crowd to arrive at. Jesus proving that He could forgive sins made the crowd marvel that God *"had given such authority to men."*

Until Jesus' coming, there had never been a human being who could forgive sins. People could set broken bones and treat illnesses. They could help the poor and console the grieving. But of and by themselves they had no answer for spiritual distress. And they had no answer for *"the wages of sin,"* which is death (Rom. 6:23). But now here was a flesh-and-blood man, Jesus, who

had an answer not only for physical ills, but for spiritual ones. He had the authority to forgive sins.

Now if you are authorized to do something, you wouldn't say the power is yours. Authority is granted to you by someone else. So if you are given the password to a company account, you receive it from someone above you. You are entrusted with what is theirs. Any authority we have in our vocations comes in this way. Even the authority parents have over their children is not something they produce by themselves. They are *given* authority. And who gives it? In his Letter to the Romans, St. Paul says, "*For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God*" (13:1).

This is how it works also with the authority to forgive sins. After His resurrection, Jesus declared to His disciples, "*As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.*" Then He breathed on them and said, "*Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld*" (Jn. 20:21,22-23). The authority Jesus received from His Father, He passed on to His disciples. He emphasized the same thing shortly before His ascension into heaven. He told them, "*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore*" (Mt. 28:18-19).

Jesus makes it clear that the authority to forgive sins—something only God can do—is now put into the mouths of His disciples to declare. And that is something to wonder about! How could Jesus give something so sacred, so precious, so powerful as the authority to forgive sins to sinners? But that is what He does. Each of you as children of God has been given this authority. When your brother or sister in Christ sins against you and repents of the sin, you can say to them, "I forgive you, and God forgives you." You can still forgive them even if they are not sorry—and it is important that you do. But the sins of the impenitent are not forgiven them by God "as long as they do not repent" (*Small Catechism*, Office of the Keys).

The Lord has also called certain men to stand in His place and declare the forgiveness of sins publicly. This is the chief responsibility of pastors. Their job is to forgive sins. They have no special power to do this because of who they are; pastors are sinners like everyone else. Their authority is given them by Jesus to speak His Word. The Word of absolution is powerful because it is from Jesus. This is why pastors preface the absolution with, "By the authority of God and of my holy office." The forgiveness comes from God to the sinner through the Word.

III

It is a great comfort to know that Jesus' absolution is available to us here and now. You may be troubled by a certain sin that you have never told anyone about. You may be filled with passions and desires that you know are against God's Commandments. You may be tempted to look at things you know you shouldn't, or to listen to things that attack your faith. Maybe you give the impression on the outside that everything is fine, while on the inside you are full of spiritual turmoil.

You do not need to carry these burdens. The Lord knows your struggle. He knows what you need the most. He says to you, "*Take heart, My [child]; your sins are forgiven.*" He can forgive your sins because on the cross He made full atonement for them, every one. The scales of justice were balanced by Jesus offering up Himself in payment for your sins.

But you may struggle to believe that even your great sins are forgiven. “How could God forgive this?!?” you wonder. You feel ashamed. You come to church, but you do not let yourself be comforted by the absolution. You go to Communion, but you feel just as troubled as before. In times like these, I encourage you to make an appointment with your pastor. One of my duties as your spiritual shepherd is to apply God’s Word to your specific situation, to your specific troubles and pain.

No one likes the thought of exposing their sins to others. But there is a certain relief in uncovering sins long hidden. You don’t need to try to keep buried anymore what your conscience keeps digging up. The way to be freed of your hidden sins and hidden hurts is through confession and absolution. If you confess your sins privately to your pastor, he is bound to keep that confession secret for the rest of your lives. He hears your confession of sin as God hears it, and your pastor never brings it up again to others just as God never brings it up again.

The healing absolution of Jesus, the declaration of the forgiveness of your sins and peace with God, is God’s powerful **Healing for Hidden Hurts**. Some of those hurts are self-inflicted, and some are inflicted by others. The hurts inflicted by others can cause you to be consumed by anger and even hatred, which can cause great spiritual harm. But through confession and absolution, all these things are left with Jesus at the cross. He bore *“our griefs and carried our sorrows”* (Is. 53:4), and in place of these burdens, He gives His eternal rest and gladness.

So bring your sins before Jesus with humble hearts and believe the soul-cleansing Word which He declares to you: *“Your sins are forgiven!”*

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen.

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