

The First Sunday after Michaelmas (Trinity 19)  
St. Matthew 9:1-8: "Your Sins Are Forgiven! Get Up!"  
October 5/6, 2019 | 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.)*

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*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. <sup>(ESV)</sup>

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

In Christ Jesus, who was delivered over to death for our sins, and who imparts forgiveness to us through His powerful Word, dear fellow redeemed:

"Do you believe in the forgiveness of sins?" A fellow pastor said he posed that question to some Jehovah's Witnesses who came to his door. It's a great question. In fact it's the perfect way to learn where people stand in spiritual matters. "Can sins be forgiven?"

People might like to know what you mean by "sins." You explain that sins are anything we do which contradicts the Commandments of God. Those Commandments are summed up by love for God and love for neighbor. If we have not perfectly done these things day in and day out, we have sinned. Then they might want to know what "forgiveness" means. You explain that forgiveness means the sins are cancelled out or pardoned, as though they had never even happened.

"Well that sounds too good to be true!" they might say. "If we have broken God's law, we can't imagine those sins are so easily removed!" You reply that the Bible clearly teaches the forgiveness of sins, but that it certainly didn't come easily. "I knew it!" they say. "God wouldn't just tell us we are forgiven. We must have to do something to prove ourselves to Him."

You tell them that there is nothing we could ever do to make up for our sins. There are too many of them. Our sins have separated us from God (Isa. 59:2). We could not make things right with Him. But He could make things right with us. God accomplished this by sending His holy Son to take on our flesh and live among us in the world. He followed God's Commandments perfectly. He never sinned. Then He offered His perfect life as a sacrifice in our place by dying on the cross.

God's Son had to die in our place. It was the only way to satisfy God's wrath against sin. It was the only way to free us from our sins and the death we deserve. So, as you said, the forgiveness of sins did not come easily—God Himself had to die for it. But it is a free gift offered to all sinners. They do not have to make up for their own sins somehow. Jesus paid the penalty for them.

Most people in the world today do not believe in the forgiveness of sins. They do not believe that a lifetime of sins could be wiped away without any contribution on their part. But then we have the account in today's Gospel. Four men brought their paralyzed friend to Jesus, because they heard about Jesus' power to heal (Luk. 5:17). After some effort, they were able to set him before Jesus. Jesus looked at the man and said, *"Take heart, My son; your sins are forgiven."*

Matthew, Mark, and Luke each record this account, but none of them includes the reaction of the paralyzed man and his friends. We imagine that Jesus' statement shocked them. As far as we can tell, they did not come to Him for forgiveness. They came to Him so that He might make the paralyzed man walk. But Jesus had something better planned. Jesus was aware of the man's need for forgiveness even if he himself was not.

This man did nothing to get this forgiveness. He did not make the case for why Jesus should bless him. He did not point to the good things he had done for God or others. He did not even ask for forgiveness! The scribes and Pharisees did not believe the forgiveness of sins could come so easily. *"Who can forgive sins but God alone?"* they thought (Mar. 2:7, Luk. 5:21). They did not believe Jesus had authority to forgive sins, because they did not believe Jesus was God.

Since that is how you feel, said Jesus, then I will prove who I am. I will demonstrate the power of My Word. So He said to the paralyzed man, *"Rise, pick up your bed and go home."* And the man did just that. The crowds were afraid and amazed when they saw this. They had seen Jesus perform miracles before, but now He proved He could forgive sins too. They glorified God that He had given this authority to men.

Here today I stand before you saying the same thing Jesus did, *"Your sins are forgiven!"* I say this not because I have the power within myself to forgive your sins. If I did, you should ask me to prove it by making a paralyzed man walk or by raising someone from the dead. But I do have the authority to declare this forgiveness. I have this authority from God, and so do you. Jesus granted this authority to the Church, which consists of all believers. He has given the Church on earth *"the keys of the kingdom of heaven"* (Mat. 16:19). Whoever the Church forgives on the basis of His Word, He forgives. Whoever the Church does not forgive, He does not forgive.

By the call of God extended through this congregation, I have been appointed to publicly administer God's grace to you through Word and Sacrament. I have been appointed to declare

your sins forgiven. When I speak this forgiveness, I am not expressing a wish that this happen for you. And it is not a forgiveness conditioned by something you have to do. Spiritually speaking, you are like the paralyzed man who can do nothing for himself and has to be brought to Jesus. The Holy Spirit brings you to Jesus through His Word. He brings you to Jesus, so that you can hear His Word from my mouth: *"Take heart! Your sins are forgiven!"*

But let me go back to the question I asked at the beginning of the sermon: Do you believe in the forgiveness of sins? Do you believe it is actually true? Could it be that God forgives the horrible things you said to your parents, your spouse, or your friend? Could it be that God forgives those bad things you did that still weigh you down with guilt? Could it be that God forgives you for the harm you caused and the lies you told?

Do you need God to give additional proof that these sins are forgiven before you believe it? Do you need Him to give you some sign to show you are right with Him? There is no other proof and no other sign God needs to show you besides the cross. That's where Jesus went for you. That's where He did the wretched work. That's where each and every one of your sins was placed on Him. That's where He atoned for your sins before God.

He did not simply pay for the small sins on the cross. He did not just pay for the usual ones that all people are guilty of. He paid for the unique sins too, the sins that make you think you are worse than everyone else around you. He paid for the big sins, even the sins that are so terrible, we can't bring ourselves to mention them. John writes that *"[Jesus] is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world"* (1Jo. 2:2). God the Father accepted Jesus' sacrifice for all sin. Your sins are forgiven!

You know this, and I know this. But we don't always act like our sins are forgiven. We know we are forgiven, but we still dwell on our failures in the past. We know we are forgiven, but we focus on our deficiencies rather than God's grace. We know we are forgiven, but we are troubled by the memories of hurt and pain we caused others.

God's forgiveness frees us from having to right our wrongs, which we couldn't do even if we tried. It also frees us so that we may try to reconcile with those we have harmed. Maybe you are still bothered by something mean you said to a classmate or coworker years ago. Maybe you feel guilty because you failed to be there for someone who needed you. Maybe you realize that the grudge you and another have held against each other has gone on way too long.

Jesus says that if you *"remember that your brother has something against you,"* then go and *"be reconciled to your brother"* (Mat. 5:23,24). But what if that person rejects your apology and refuses to forgive? Then you can take comfort that the sin is forgiven by God. But what if acknowledging a secret sin causes a person you care about to turn against you? Then at least your conscience will be clear, and the burden you have long carried will be removed. You can also trust that God's grace and forgiveness which comfort you will also work on the hearts of those whom you hurt.

After Jesus had forgiven the man's sins, He told him to get up, pick up his mat, and go home. And when Jesus forgives your sins, He calls you to get up also. As He raised up the man from physical paralysis, so He raises you from spiritual paralysis. Your sins are forgiven—don't sit

there in despair! Your sins are forgiven—go forward in grace! Your sins are forgiven—declare what God has done for you! And let that joy start in your own home just like the previously paralyzed man did.

There is no way to get your sins forgiven apart from Jesus. But by faith in Him worked by the Holy Spirit, forgiveness is yours. Your sins were put on Jesus, so none of them cling to you anymore—not the sins of your youth, not the sins of a year ago, not the sins of yesterday. **Your Sins Are Forgiven! Get Up!** And give glory to God.

*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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