

The First Sunday after Michaelmas (Trinity 19) – Pr. Faugstad sermon  
St. Matthew 9:1-8: “Jesus Forgives the Sins He Sees.”  
October 2/3, 2021 | 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 went to the cross bearing our sin and guilt, and who now declares us innocent of all wrongdoing through His Word of absolution, dear fellow redeemed:

Sometimes our mistakes leave marks that are visible to others. A few years ago, an NFL player was playing with fireworks. One of them went off in his hand and caused extensive damage to his fingers. His injury is a constant reminder to himself and others of the mistake he made. But most of our mistakes, most of our sins, do not leave visible marks. Most of the time, we are able to cover up our sins, and no one ever knows about them but ourselves.

And as long as no one ever finds out, it’s like the sin never actually happened, right? This is what we tell ourselves. It starts when we see something we want. We make sure no one else is around. We check over our shoulders and check again. Then we indulge ourselves. The pattern is the same whether it is a child sneaking cookies, someone looking at explicit content on his smartphone, or an employee stealing things at work. “As long as I don’t get caught, then everything is okay.”

But of course everything is not okay. We might have been able to hide our sin from others, but we can’t hide it from ourselves. We see it. It plays over and over again in our mind. We wish we hadn’t done it, but we can’t take it back. We want to come clean, but we can’t bear the thought

of other people knowing our deep flaws. How do we deal with these invisible scars? How do we deal with the guilt of our own sins? Today's Gospel reading shows us the way forward.

We hear about a paralyzed man. We're not told how he got that way. It could have been an accident that was totally out of his control. Or maybe it was because of reckless behavior. Whatever the cause, this young man had some dedicated friends. Four friends carried him on a bed to the house where Jesus was preaching, but they could not make their way inside. The crowd was too large. So they climbed up on the roof and removed enough of the clay roof tiles, so they could lower the paralyzed man before Jesus.

Imagine the scene: Jesus is preaching, and everyone's attention is fixed on Him. Then there are footsteps above on the roof. Then pieces of dust and dirt and clay start showering down on people's heads. Everyone looks up, probably Jesus too. Then blue sky, the room gets brighter, and heads peer down from a hole in the ceiling. Then a large object fills the space and is lowered down through the opening. What a scene!

Now put yourself in the place of the paralyzed man. You're up pretty high. There's nothing you can do but trust your friends to hang on and not drop you. You inch lower and lower, looking to see past the edge of your bed at the people in the room. And then Jesus comes in view. What is the look on His face? Is it irritation? Surprise? Anger? No, the look on His face is warm concern; it's compassion.

What would you say to Jesus if you had His attention like this, looking Him right in the eye? What would you say if it were just the two of you with no one else around? We have rehearsed this before. When the troubles in our lives keep getting worse and nothing is going the way it should, we want to ask Him why. Doesn't He see? Doesn't He care? Why doesn't He help? We wonder why He doesn't take away our pain, make everything better. We think of all the things we would say to Him face-to-face if only we had the chance.

Perhaps it was the same for the paralyzed man. Maybe he wondered why he should have to suffer like this. Why him and not everyone else around him? But when the opportunity finally arrived, he said nothing. Nothing needed to be said. Jesus knew. He knew the hardships of this young man. He knew the deep concern of those who brought him. He knew what brought them to Him. *"[W]hen Jesus saw their faith—the faith of the friends and of the man set before Him—He said to the paralytic, 'Take heart, My son; your sins are forgiven.'"*

Is that what the man needed the most? It seems like what he needed most was physical healing. He needed to be able to walk again, so he would no longer be such a burden on his friends. But that was not his greatest need. We don't know the young man's history. We don't know what troubles he had faced, what anguish he had felt, what guilt weighed down on him. If we knew about his past, maybe we would think he deserved his paralysis. Maybe we would think he should have neither spiritual nor physical relief.

But the Lord is ever merciful and gracious. He constantly gives the opposite of what is deserved. The times that we get angry with Jesus or question Him are the times that we think He is failing us. He is not giving us what we believe we deserve. That is dangerous territory.

We are not entitled to anything from God. We don't deserve anything good from Him. We deserve to be punished for our sins. We deserve eternal damnation.

But that is not what Jesus gives us. He lets us bring all our grievances to Him, and then He meets us not with anger or with annoyance. He meets us with absolution. He comes to us with grace. *"Take heart, My child,"* He says; *"your sins are forgiven."* What sins of the paralyzed man did He forgive? The sins that only He could see, sins that we know nothing about. And what sins of yours does He forgive? Only the ones He can see.

Which sins are these? We ask that question in our Catechism. The answer is the sins that we commit in every area of our lives—the sins we commit as fathers and mothers, sons and daughters, employers and employees; the sins of our disobedience, dishonesty, laziness; the sins of unkind speech and hurtful action; sins of neglect, wastefulness, and so on.

Many of these sins only you know about. Only you know the depth of your sinfulness, the darkness that clouds your love for God and neighbor. Only you know the extent of your selfishness, your pride, and your judgmental attitude toward others. But today's reading shows that Another knows.

When Jesus forgave the paralyzed man his sins, the scribes and Pharisees thought to themselves, *"This man is blaspheming! Only God can forgive sins, and this man is not God!"* They did not say this out loud. No one could have known what was in their hearts, no one except Jesus. *"Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, 'Why do you think evil in your hearts?'"*

Just as He could see faith in the paralyzed man and his friends, so He could see sin and unbelief in the scribes and Pharisees. Nothing is hidden from Him. *"Can a man hide himself in secret places so that I cannot see him? declares the LORD. Do I not fill heaven and earth? declares the LORD"* (Jer. 23:24). The Lord sees. He sees all. That is terrifying. It means He knows all the sins that we have carefully tried to hide from others.

But this is also comforting. Because the Lord knows all my wrongs, I don't have to try to hide them. I don't have to carry my burden of guilt. I can own up to them, admit them. I can hand them over to Him. That's exactly what we do when we confess our sins. We pull them out in the open. We bring them into the light. And we leave them there for Jesus to deal with.

And Jesus says, *"I'll gladly take them. I will take them away."* But He doesn't take them somewhere and bury them where they might be found again and brought against us. He took your sins to Himself, and He erased them and all the evidence of them. The trail of evidence leading to your sinfulness goes to the cross, and it stops there. The evidence never points to you, because Jesus blotted out all evidence of your sinning with His holy blood.

On the cross, Jesus suffered only for the sins of yours that He knew about, only for the ones He could see. And He saw them all. He suffered and died for the sins you have never told another soul about. He suffered and died for the sins you have convinced yourself are unforgivable. He forgives them. He paid for those sins.

When He looks at you, He does not see your sins anymore. He sees His dear child. He does not ask for anything. He does not seek payment or proof that you know how badly you messed up. He looks at you with mercy and compassion and says, *“Your sins are forgiven! Rise up and go your way.”*

This is the message that He has sent me, your pastor, to proclaim. The crowds were right to *“[glorify] God, who had given such authority to men,”* because He has. He has given His church the authority to forgive sins, and that forgiveness is announced publicly by your pastor. I have been around you long enough to see some of your sins, just as you have seen some of mine. But when I or the vicar speak the absolution, we speak the forgiveness of all sin, even the sins nobody else knows about.

Jesus knows your sins even better than you do, because He suffered in anguish paying for each and every one on the cross. The absolution that you hear today is a constant pointing to His sacrifice. And if His absolution does not settle the question in your mind about whether or not He forgives your sin, He also invites you to His table. There He places His own holy body and blood in your mouth, and He tells you what that faithful eating and drinking is for—*“for the remission of your sins.”*

You see your sins, but Jesus does not see them anymore. He forgives them.

*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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