

The Nineteenth Sunday after Trinity – Pr. Faugstad sermon
St. Matthew 9:1-8: “When Sin Is Magnified, So Is God’s Grace.”
October 14/15, 2023 | 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 [are] 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. (Joh. 17:17)

In Christ Jesus, whose grace abundantly covers all our sins, even the secret ones of our mind and heart, dear fellow redeemed:

How would you like to have the super power, the special ability, to know what the people around you are thinking? You could know if they liked you or didn’t like you, if they were lying to you or telling the truth, if they were looking to help you or harm you. That could be a very useful tool to have. But it could also be very depressing. Just imagine all the dark thoughts, plans, and desires you would become aware of. If you had this power, I think you would find it difficult to look anyone in the eye!

It is clear from today’s reading that Jesus had this power. First of all, the evangelist Matthew writes that Jesus “*saw the faith*” of the paralytic and the men who carried him. How could He *see* faith? He could see faith in action as the men brought their friend to Jesus. But kind actions alone do not prove that people have faith, since unbelievers sometimes do nice things too. Jesus could see their hearts. He knew they had saving faith. They believed that Jesus had come from God to do gracious work among them.

Seeing their faith, Jesus offered the paralytic an unexpected gift. The expected gift was healing. That is what Jesus had been doing throughout Judea and Galilee. But He wanted to give the

paralyzed man something better than physical healing, something more. Jesus looked with compassion at the man and said, *"Take heart, My son; your sins are forgiven."* Jesus knew what the man needed most—He could *see* what the man needed most—and He gave it to him: forgiveness, no strings attached.

The scribes and Pharisees didn't like this, but they didn't say so out loud. They judged Jesus in their hearts. *"He is blaspheming!"* they thought to themselves. *"Who can forgive sins but God alone?"* (Mar. 2:7). Just as Jesus had *seen* the faith of the paralytic and his friends, so He *knew* the thoughts of the scribes and Pharisees. Nothing was hidden from Him. *"Why do you think evil in your hearts?"* He asked.

Jesus knew their evil, even though it wasn't expressed in words or actions. This knowledge of their thoughts had to mean that Jesus was God, because who besides God can know a person's hidden thoughts? David acknowledged this about the LORD in Psalm 139: *"You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar.... Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O LORD, you know it altogether"* (vv. 2, 4).

God knows everything we do, say, and think. And yet this doesn't seem to trouble us as much as if the people around us knew all our deep, dark secrets. Why is that the case? Why are we more concerned about how others see us than how God sees us? Perhaps we think the consequences would be worse if our neighbors knew our sins. We think about how it could affect our reputation, our job, our family, our opportunities.

Having God know our sins doesn't seem quite as bad. He has put up with us so far, so He will probably keep putting up with us. When we get comfortable in our sin, it shows that we have no real fear of God. We act like He is far distant from us, too busy to bother with our little sins. Or we justify our sins in our own minds, so that they don't seem like such a big deal. We might have thoughts like these:

- "I'm not the one who started the rumor, and that person probably needs to be taken down a few notches anyway."
- "Well everyone looks at porn, and it's not like I'm hurting anyone by looking."
- "What does it matter if I bend the truth a little? They don't want to hear the truth anyhow."
- "Why can't I give myself to someone else as long as we both love each other? We're planning to get married someday anyway."

It could be that the people around us approve of all these things. They might do them too, and if everyone is okay with them, how wrong can they be? Or if we do avoid these sins, we might get made fun of or judged. So we try to do what is right and be nice to others, but it isn't making life any easier. And then we come to church each week, and we have to hear how we have fallen short. Isn't it enough that we have tried to do and say the right things? Why do we have to worry about our thoughts? Why does the church have to be so focused on pointing out and uncovering sins?

Here's another question: why did Jesus think that what the paralyzed man needed most was forgiveness? If we had been in the crowd that day, we would have been eager to see Jesus heal the man of his paralysis. That would have been the foremost thing on our minds. But Jesus sees

deeper. “[M]an looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart” (1Sa. 16:7). The man’s most pressing problem was not his paralysis; it was his sin.

And so it is for you and me. Sin separates us from God. The apostle Paul writes that “*the wages of sin is death*” (Rom. 3:23)—what we deserve and earn by our sin is death. Trying to justify the wrong things we do or think does not enhance our life; it is sin that delivers us over to death. The eyes and ears and mouth and body I use to do whatever I want, they are not actually mine. They are God’s eyes and ears and mouth and body. They are gifts from Him. He formed them before we knew anything about life in this world.

How well have we used these gifts of God? How have we used our eyes, ears, and mouth, our brain and our heart, our hands and our feet? Have they been animated by the Holy Spirit and used in love toward God and neighbor? Or have these parts and members of our body often been inactive or paralyzed by sin?

So we find ourselves lowered down from the place of our pride and set right here in Jesus’ presence. What will He do? In fact, He has already done. Remember how we said how hard it would be to look anyone in the eye if we could read all their thoughts? The Son of God came down among us, and He not only looked us in the eye, He said, “Give me what is yours, and I will give you what is Mine.”

What He took from you is your sin. He took the big sins and the little sins, the open sins that everyone knows about and the secret sins that no one knows about. He took the sins of your eyes and ears and mouth and hands and feet. He even took the sins of your mind and heart, the sins that only He knew about. He put all those sins on Himself and went to the cross to make the payment for them. What we can’t bear the thought of—everyone seeing our sins—He became that for you on the cross. He wore your sins and let everyone mock Him, laugh at Him, reject Him. He did that for you.

And in exchange for your sins, He gives you His righteousness. He credits you with the perfect use of His eyes, ears, and mouth, the perfect use of His hands and feet, the perfect use of His mind and heart. All His holy works, all His holy words, all His holy thoughts—all of them yours. Who can measure this gift!

This is why we apply the magnifying glass of the Law to our body and mind and heart. We need to see how deep our sin goes, if that is even possible. We need to see what Jesus had to carry. We need to see why He had to die. We need to see our sin and know it—every one of us—so that we clearly see and know the great love of the Father in sending His only Son to save us.

The many ways we have sinned against God seem unforgivable. And yet here is Jesus looking down on a poor sinner and saying, “*Take heart, My son; your sins are forgiven.*” He says the same thing to you. You hear it in the absolution at the beginning of the service. You hear it in the Lord’s Supper, His body and blood “*given and shed for you for the remission of sins.*” And you hear it in the sermon when your pastor proclaims the Gospel, the good news, to you.

The crowds were right that God had given men the authority to forgive sins. They saw the Man Jesus forgive the sins of the paralytic and prove it by healing his body. Then after Jesus' death and resurrection which won the victory over sin and death, He gave the authority to forgive sins to His Church. He said to His disciples, *"Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained"* (Joh. 20:22-23, NKJV).

This is what you have called me to declare on your behalf. You have told me to preach the Law, so that you are reminded how you have fallen short of the glory of God. You don't want to become secure in your sin and lose sight of your Savior. Once the Law has done its work, you eagerly listen for the Gospel which cleanses your heart and frees your conscience. No words could ever sound sweeter in your ears than these.

So now, as Jesus has commanded and as you have called me to proclaim—by the authority of God and of my holy office, I declare to you the gracious forgiveness of all your sins, in the name of the Father and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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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