

Sermon for Sunday, October 23, 2022 – Trinity XIX
Matthew 9:1-8

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Amen.

“When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, ‘Son, your sins are forgiven.’ Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, ‘Why does this fellow talk like that? He’s blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?’ Immediately Jesus knew in His Spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts, and He said to them, ‘Why are you thinking these things? Which is easier: to say to the paralytic, “Your sins are forgiven,” or to say, “Get up, take your mat and walk”? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins...’” Thus far our text.

What would you do if you were diagnosed with a disease that was termed to be incurable by the medical establishment, if you were given only a few weeks to live, and were told you would be in terrible pain during that entire period of time? Such is the case for many people in our world today, and they and their family members are often at their wits’ end trying to find anything that can serve as a faint beam of hope into their awful situation. They often are desperate and grasp at any leads that they are given in order to find some sort of solution to the problem. In this area of the country, we are fortunate to have great medical care, in fact, some of the greatest surgeons and doctors in the world, but even they are mortal men and women, and have their limitations. Think of the desperation that must set in for those in other corners of the world where medical care is

either non-existent or primitive at best. There are even television advertisements that promise “miracle cures” for the most serious ailments, but these more often than not give false hope to folks who have already had their hopes dashed one time after another.

In our text, the paralytic was in much the same desperate straits. Though he had not been diagnosed as having a “terminal” illness in the clearest sense of the word, without a great degree of help, his position in society wasn’t going to be secure much longer. In a day before the Americans with Disabilities Act had made large strides in making public accommodations accessible to wheelchair-bound folks and others that are disabled, the man had little chance if no chance of gaining a job, of even getting enough food to eat. He was in pain most of his life, because every aspect of his life was a struggle. And there was nothing that the medical establishment of the day could do for him. Obviously, he was desperate. That’s where we find him (and his four friends) at the beginning of our passage – he was willing to do just about anything to be cured of his affliction in life, so that he would have some hope for the future. Just like a terminal cancer patient of our day and age, he was looking for a curative miracle!

Desperate times call for desperate measures. We know this in our own lives. Many people are willing to take chances they wouldn’t ordinarily take, if the stakes are high enough, and the risk to life or limb strong enough if they don’t take action immediately. Obviously, the men that were carrying the paralytic around had heard that Jesus was able to do some wonderful healings. He had turned the water into wine at the wedding banquet by this time; He had done some other healings of various other diseases and demon possessions. He had built up a sufficient reputation that there were crowds of people waiting in line for hours to get close enough to Him to touch Him. When the

people found out where He was staying, they would come in droves to receive His healing touch, and to witness the power that He had in His body.

When they couldn't get through the crowds, they went up on the roof to try to gain access in another way. Much like when we are in a hurry to get somewhere, we try to avoid traffic jams by taking another route. These men were trying to get to Jesus without having to bear this man through the crowds at the doors. They cut through the roof and lowered the man down to where Jesus was via ropes. This was not an easy thing to do. It required a lot of equipment and a lot of hard work. They risked the owner of the house pressing charges for breaking and entering and vandalism, among other things. At the very least, I'm sure the homeowner wasn't happy that someone was cutting a hole in the middle of his roof! The men doing this, however, were so certain that if they were to bring the man into Jesus' presence, then everything would be o.k. We can imagine that the people who were waiting outside in line weren't too happy about these men who were "cutting" in line. There must have been quite the uproar at their actions. But the men were determined, and they were desperate, and they were willing to try just about anything to gain the paralytic another shot at life.

Jesus' response, on the other hand, when He saw the paralytic for the first time, wasn't very promising! He saw the man laying on the mat, unable to move, being lowered into position by four men with ropes, and His response was not what they expected it to be. He said to the man, "Son, your sins are forgiven." The men lowering the ropes, and even the paralytic, must have thought that Jesus was missing the boat a little bit here! "We went through all of the trouble to bring this man to you, and you can't offer any relief to him today?" they must have thought. "All that you can promise is

something in the future? What about his life today, or a week, or a month from now?" It would be like offering someone a free tank of gas when they didn't own a car. This forgiveness of sins wasn't what the man needed, according to their thoughts. Rather, he needed to be healed and able to walk.

But before we think that Jesus was being callous, or was just having an off day, or not caring about the man's obvious physical suffering, we must remember that God's will is much greater than ours, because it is not limited by our imperfect perspective. Jesus knew that He could heal the man of his paralysis, but without the forgiveness of sins, he would not enter eternal life. Thus, he could heal the man for the time being, but that wouldn't last forever. Jesus had His priorities in order – deal with the biggest problem first, and then move on to the more minor difficulties. Much like a Triage nurse in an emergency room, Jesus dealt with the most pressing needs first, and then dealt with things that were less important. Sometimes, those who work in Triage are forced to rank some quite serious injuries as non-life-threatening, because they are having to deal with some things that would make most of our stomachs turn. Even though paralysis was a big deal, the need for the forgiveness of sins is much more important and life-threatening.

Our first response might be that this was rather heartless on the part of our Savior. But the fact is that He cares for each one of us more than we can even fathom. We might want Him to make our lives easier here on earth, but He wants to make our lives perfect once we get to heaven. Even though we might not understand this right now, the time that we have left on this earth is much shorter than we think that it is. The time that we have to look forward to in heaven, on the other hand, is eternal, without end, everlasting.

Man's greatest need is a Savior from our sins; without it, the other healings that He can provides to us are moot points.

Jesus later went on to heal the man's body; He didn't just leave him hanging. That is the way that God deals with us in every aspect of our lives. He blesses us with everything that we need, and then more. He doesn't just heal us of our sins; He is with us every step of the way in our lives. He never leaves us nor forsakes us but blesses us and sustains us. It proves to us that His love is greater than we are used to, because it is perfect, as He is perfect. His number one goal is to save and preserve us, His children. He doesn't want us to be condemned because of our sinfulness, but rather be taken by Him into heaven. He blesses us in this world with more than we can imagine, and certainly more than we deserve. He is a loving and merciful God, who abundantly blesses us every day of our lives.

The response of the religious leaders was predictable, because it matches what we might be thinking right about now. They thought that Jesus was assuming too much power, thinking that He was equivalent to God. After all, they rightly thought that God alone could forgive sins, and here was this man from Nazareth, thinking that He had the right to do such things. They refused to believe what their eyes could not see. They saw a mere man; what they actually were seeing was God. They refused to believe that there was any salvation outside of keeping the law perfectly. They refused to believe that man could not keep the law of God on his own; that he needed a Savior, and that the Savior was in their midst. It just didn't make sense!

It would be similar to someone thinking that they were the CEO of a large company, when in actuality they were the janitor! It would be laughable for the janitor to

don a suit and a tie, and sit at the CEO's desk, and try to run the company. But that's what the teachers of the law and the scribes thought Jesus was doing. That's why they were trying so hard to trap Him and discount His teachings. The difference between this analogy and reality, of course, is that He truly is who He says He is – the God of all creation, the Lord of heaven and earth.

We do the same thing as the religious leaders of Jesus' time. We discount His working in our lives today and think that creation was actually just something that happened long ago, in a "big bang", or that men evolved on their own from other animals, or that miracles in the operating rooms of hospitals are solely the work of doctors. We rule God's Word out of our lives every day; we think that we know better! Before we condemn the religious leaders of Jesus' day for their doubts, let us remember that we, too, have them, and that we, too, would not have believed if we were there 2000 years ago.

Jesus specializes in the unexpected. He healed the paralytic, who obviously needed help with his day-to-day activities, of his sins first, and then went on to heal his body. Even when the four men who hoisted the man into the house where Jesus was, exhibiting great faith in His ability to solve the man's physical problems, Jesus doesn't let their exuberance distract Him from the number one problem at hand. When the religious leaders didn't believe that He had the power to forgive sins, and that He truly was God, He healed the man of his paralysis to prove to them that He indeed had the power from on high. Even though they were reluctant to believe in His Lordship, He did whatever was necessary to conquer their unbelief, and restored them to a right relationship with Himself by His actions.

In the same way, when we are feeling downtrodden by the troubles that beset us in life, He heals our sins first, giving us the hope of heaven, and then moves on to give us more physical blessings than we can even count. He forgives our sins in the waters of Holy Baptism, and His Body and Blood in the Sacrament of the Altar. He blesses us with all of the gifts that we have in our lives and sustains the faith that He placed in our hearts by the working of the Holy Spirit. When we think that we are on our last fumes of strength, and cannot continue any longer, we can draw courage and comfort from the fact that Jesus loves us so much that He does for us what He did for the paralytic – He forgives our sins, heals our bodies, and gives us everything that we have in this life and in the life to come. His love is so strong for us that it knows no bounds in its definition but continues to surprise us and wow us throughout our lives, even until eternity. Thanks be to God that He doesn't just heal our bodies, but also cures our souls. We don't know what we need, or what is important to our lives, but He does, and He makes sure that we are well provided for forever. Amen.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now may the peace of God, which surpasses all human understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Savior and Lord. Amen.