Text: Mt. 9:1-8 I. N. I. Sermon #2048

Heavenly Father, You delivered Your Son for our offenses and raised Him for our justification. Grant that we may also trust in the word of forgiveness, which You have given Your pastors to proclaim, that clinging to Your good and gracious promises, we might be brought to eternal life; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen. (Luther's Small Catechism, CPH 2017, p. 321.)

So [Jesus] got into a boat, crossed over, and came to His own city. Then behold, they brought to Him a paralytic lying on a bed. When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, "Son, be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven you." And at once some of the scribes said within themselves, "This Man blasphemes!" But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, "Why do you think evil in your hearts? For which is easier, to say, '*Your* sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Arise and walk'? But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins"—then He said to the paralytic, "Arise, take up your bed, and go to your house." And he arose and departed to his house. Now when the multitudes saw *it,* they marveled and glorified God, who had given such power to men.

In Christ Jesus, who has always been eager and ready to show compassion to His fellowman in deed and word, dear fellow redeemed:

Do you remember in school when the teacher would ask a question there were a few students whose hands invariably shot up at once, they could barely keep seated, and depending on the teacher's ability to manage the classroom could even be heard saying – *"Me, me, me!"* Perhaps that was you. It was not me. If anything, I was sitting on my hands lest even a scratch to my nose would give the impression that I wanted to answer.

[Now I know Pr. Sparley would have known the answer but not sure if his Norwegian heritage would have prevented him from being so demonstrative. But if the teacher would have asked "Can any of you answer this question?" Steve would have been the only one saying: "I, I, I can!"]

I have noticed that over the 41 years that I have served as one of Jesus' pastors, I have become increasingly eager to speak the word of forgiveness and even must bite my tongue at times as a fellow Christian speaks of his or her spiritual struggles. My guess is that Pastor Sparley has

found the same thing. But it is wise to remain silent and listen before the person is done speaking, because excuses may be expressed or blaming someone/something else for what seemed at first to be a confession of sin.

Based on our text and hearing Jesus speak His first words, words of absolution, to the paralyzed man, we will take note that **Jesus' Pastors Are Also Eager and Ready to Absolve.**

I

St. Mark's account sets the scene for us with a few more details regarding the situation at the house where Jesus was preaching. "Many were gathered together, so that there was no more room, not even at the door. And Jesus was preaching the word to them. And they came, bringing to Him a paralytic carried by four men. And they could not get near Him because of the crowd, they removed the roof above Him and when they had made an opening, they let down the bed on which the paralytic lay."

With that in mind, consider how it is that "When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, 'Son, be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven you.'" Do you think this is what the four bed bearers thought Jesus would say? Or the paralyzed man? Or anyone in that crowded house? Jesus' enemies did not expect it, but used it as an opportunity to attack Him in their minds, accusing Jesus of blasphemy. In other words, who does this Jesus of Nazareth think He is? God? Only God can forgive sins, after all!

Now you and I are blessed to know and trust Jesus is God, but many on the day of our text did not. Jesus is going to use this incident to make the point that as the Lord of the Church He is giving this power and authority to His Church on earth to forgive sins. More on this later, but let us now briefly consider the need for this message of forgiveness from God.

Sometimes pastors need to withhold forgiveness because the person is impenitent. The prophet Samuel refused to forgive King Saul because he blamed the people for his disobedience, even though he pleaded to be

forgiven. The prophet Nathan confronted King David in his impenitence. But after being convicted by God's Law, Nathan was able to forgive.

Perhaps some suspiciously thought the day of our text, or even you hearing the account today, that this paralyzed man must have committed some grievous sin to warrant Jesus absolving him like this. Maybe it was or this man thought that his paralysis was a direct result of a certain sin. Regardless, we know how our guilt and shame can weigh heavy upon us, especially when we fall upon stressful times. It is easy for us to conclude that the difficulties we experience are directly due to our sin. So, hearing from our Lord our sins are forgiven, the load is lifted from us.

Sons and daughters in Christ Jesus' name, your sins have all been removed from you as far as the east is from the west. Be of good cheer indeed, or as your pastors often say right before absolving you: "Lift up your hearts!" Pastor Sparley, this has been your joy to declare on a regular basis for the past 40 years in this holy office. Our gracious Lord has made you eager and ready at all times to absolve in His saving name.

Now as indicated there can be times when a pastor might need to withhold forgiveness because of apparent impenitence. Like the prophet Samuel when Saul asked to be forgiven for his disobedience (1Sam. 15:10-35), or as Paul did in Corinth with the man having a sexual affair with what appears to be his stepmother (1Cor. 5:1ff.). But while not the case with Saul, the Corinthian man did repent and Paul was eager and ready to forgive. (2Cor. 2:5ff.).

II

Now, let's consider the reaction of the crowd gathered in that house which witnessed this interaction between Jesus and the paralyzed man. We are told at the end: "Now when the multitudes saw *it,* they marveled and glorified God, who had given such power to men." We might think they stood in awe at the miracle of healing the paralysis. No doubt they did, but the power they especially marveled at was actually the power to forgive sins, and that this was given to us, the human race.

Follow how Jesus set this up for them to conclude: He confronted the charge of blasphemy for forgiving sins because in the minds of Jesus' accusers, only God could forgive sins. Jesus' challenge for their evil thoughts about him comes out in this question and subsequent action: Jesus asked – "For which is easier, to say, '*Your* sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Arise and walk'? But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins"—then He said to the paralytic, "Arise, take up your bed, and go to your house." Obviously, it would be easier to say to someone that his/her sins are forgiven, because how can you measure it to see that they are? You cannot. But if you say to a paralyzed man *"arise and walk"* and he remains paralyzed and is unable to get up and walk, it is obvious you do not have the power to heal.

Our sinful natures like to think that it is really not forgiveness that we need, after all we are only human and all human beings are guilty of misjudgments and mistakes. But our sinful reason tells us that we just need some guidance and counseling so that we can start behaving ourselves better. That is a huge lie of Satan, because if he convinces us of this, we think we do not need a Savior from sin, but only an example of holy living to follow. As though our sin is not an eternal problem, just a daily issue.

It is common in our culture today to think that pastors are mainly counselors who will help their "clients" by talking them into better behavior. While certainly pastors can give pastoral counseling in regard to what God has taught us in the Holy Scriptures, the primary function of the pastor's office is the same as the mission of Christ's Church: to forgive sins.

What the people in that crowd the day of our text came to understand, Jesus taught clearly, that His Church is given the power and authority to forgive sins. As He said elsewhere: "He who hears you hears Me." Jesus' miracle of healing proved He can and does give such power.

My fellow sinners, there is no talking you out of your state of sinfulness, rather as your Lord clearly knows and has instituted, you need Him to forgive you especially through those He calls into your midst to do

this through His Church here on earth. Pastor Sparley you too probably have had Christians from other denominations who have objected to these words spoken in the absolution: *"By the authority of God and of my holy office I forgive you all your sins, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."* Jesus clearly gives such authority to His Church in our text.

We should recall the incident when a sinful woman washed Jesus' feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair at the home of a Pharisee, He said to her "Your sins are forgiven." The Pharisees at the table asked: "Who is this, who even forgives sins?" If you have questioned how Jesus forgives sins today even despising the office of the holy ministry which Christ has established to do this for you asking *Who is this, who even forgives sins?* – you are forgiven in Jesus' name. And in response to that good news, give praise to your gracious Lord like the crowd did in our text that He provides you with pastors, who like Him, are eager and ready to forgive sins.

Arise, and go to your houses today justified before God for Jesus' sake, as did this once paralyzed man, the sinful woman absolved by Jesus in the home of a Pharisee, and countless others who through Word and Sacrament have been unburdened of all their sins for Jesus' sake. Amen.

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