

Sermon Trinity 19 2020

October 18, 2020

Matthew 9:1-8

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. This morning we meditate on the Gospel Lesson previously read.

“This Jesus is blaspheming! Look at it! Here He is and He’s saying that He can forgive sins. Did you hear it? He told this man who needs healing that the man’s sin is forgiven!”

When you picture it, you can put yourself in the shoes of the Pharisees and picture what they’re thinking. Here’s this man and He’s making the audacious claim that He can forgive sins. How can He say this? And as we’re in their shoes we have to ask, what about the temple? Think about it. Here these Pharisees still lived in the day where there was the superstructure in Jerusalem. The Temple, the place where all of Israel was understood to be called to bring their offerings and their sacrifices. And what happened there every morning and every evening? The priests brought their sacrifices to the altar there. They brought burnt offerings, grain offerings, drink offerings. To what end? For the forgiveness of sins! And why? Because that is what God had told them to do! When God had spoken from the Mount of Sinai, He gave them this instruction. There was the Ark of the Covenant, that was in the Holy of Holies, then you had the Holy Place which the priest was to enter bringing prayers for Israel as these sacrifices were made. And it was the priest’s job to bring Israel before God in that prayer, to bring them before God for what? For God’s blessing, for God’s care, for God’s forgiveness.

But here is this man disrupting that. Now, where is God bringing this forgiveness? Well, apparently wherever this Jesus wanted. And the Pharisees may even have been thinking that if this guy says He can do it, what about that guy there, and that random Joe, or random Levi, or random Nathaniel.

Of course, as we look at this, we get it, right? We get that Jesus is proving He can do it. I mean, it’s not like every Joe, Levi, or Nathaniel was performing miracles, was it? It’s not like they were telling these paralytics their sins were forgiven and the paralytics were getting up and walking. I guess, we don’t know if there were others who were claiming that forgiveness, but we know it wasn’t happening like this if they were. But that should make us ask the question. What’s the connection between this forgiveness and the healing? Jesus clearly intends to heal this man, yet He doesn’t tell the man to get up and walk until after He’s already told him that his sin is forgiven. That means that focus of the conversation is the forgiveness. Why?

I’m guessing a lot of you know already, but what it is it? Why was this man paralyzed? Why is anyone paralyzed? Sin, right? And we don’t mean a specific sin. It doesn’t matter if

this guy was paralyzed because he disobeyed his parents when he was a kid and jumped off the top level of their house. It doesn't matter if he got drunk one night and fell off his camel riding home from the tavern. It doesn't matter if he just sadly had something like some kind of palsy. We mean that this came because of sin in general. That's why we become paralyzed. That's why we suffer. That's why we die. That's why this man couldn't move. Sin. The brokenness of this world under the curse that has come because we have rebelled against the God who is our love and who is our life. And when sin is the problem, what is the solution? Forgiveness. Thus Jesus' declaration that this man's sin is forgiven.

But what is Jesus really saying? Look at His words, **“that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins?”** He's saying this that the Pharisees, that you would know what authority He has. He has the strength, the power, the ability, the right even to declare sins forgiven. And take a minute to think about that. If I do something to harm you, who has the authority to forgive me in that case? Only you, right? Only the person who has been offended is the one who can forgive. When Jesus says that He can forgive sins, He's putting Himself in the place of the One who has been offended, which means He is putting Himself in the place of God.

Now, you know we get the extra insight, don't we? We say, “Of course Jesus can put Himself in the place of God!” Why? Because He's God! And how do we know that this man is God in the flesh? Because that's what the Church has always taught. Because that's what the New Testament tells us. His Name is Immanuel, His Name is God with us. His Name is Jesus because He will save His people from their sin. And how do we ultimately know? Because everything He said was confirmed. It wasn't just confirmed like we see it in this healing here. It wasn't just that Jesus said, “Your sins are forgiven,” and this paralytic walked. No. The Father confirmed this work of His Son by raising Him from the dead after He had died. That's where it all comes to a head. In the resurrection, there we see the proof that everything this Nazarene said is true. All the claims He made. All the times He said that He had power and authority. All the ways He claimed that God was His Father, all the ways He claimed standing that only God could claim. They were all proved when the temple of His body was destroyed and He raised it again in three days.

I mentioned the temple earlier, about the forgiveness that was there. Those of you who have been to or listened to the Wednesday morning Bible Class the last couple of weeks maybe heard the conversation about the Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur. On that day, the High Priest would not only offer burnt offerings, drink offerings, grain offerings for the people. On that day there would be a unique sacrifice. A sacrifice not just brought to the Altar of Incense in the Holy Place. No, on that day the High Priest would go behind the curtain and there would be the Ark of the Covenant. And he would bring the blood of that sacrifice, first for his own sins, then for the sins of the people. He would bring that blood to

the Ark. He would sprinkle it on the top of the Ark, the flat part of it, called the mercy seat. And the people would wait. They would wait to see the High Priest come out. In fact, tradition even said that they would put a chain on the High Priest's ankle in case he didn't come out. And what were they waiting for, why might he not come out? He might not come out if the sacrifice wasn't accepted, if the offering for his sins or the sins of the people was not received. He wouldn't come out because he would be dead, and there would not be forgiveness for the people. The resurrection of Jesus was His coming out from behind the curtain. His resurrection was the declaration that sin has been forgiven.

And in that resurrection, even your sin has been forgiven. In that resurrection this Son of man who has authority on earth to forgive sins tells you this is true for you. The paralysis of your sin has been forgiven and you are alive again in Him. You are alive to love, to live, to serve in His life, His love, His service to you. It may not always look like it, it may not always feel like it. In fact, because we don't deserve it, it often doesn't look like it or feel like it. But we trust this Word over and against everything else in the world. Over and against everything that would tell us that this man blasphemes.

I say that because think about our day how this is still blasphemy. Of course, it's blasphemy in a totally different way than it was for the Pharisees. The Pharisees said this man putting Himself in the place of God was blaspheming, He was blaspheming by claiming such authority for Himself.

On the one hand we can make a direct connection to the call of a pastor. Think about what I say at the beginning of every service. "As a called and ordained servant of the Word, I forgive you all your sins in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." Have you ever had a conversation with a protestant friend about that? They likely brought up this passage. Or maybe you have thought it yourself. Am I blaspheming every Sunday? If it weren't properly understood it could appear that way. However, I totally agree. Only God, only Jesus has the authority to forgive your sins. When I say I'm doing it, I'm not forgiving you from the authority of my person. I have no authority to do that. No I'm doing it out of the authority of my office, of my call. I'm doing it by the authority of our Lord Jesus who says, "Anyone's sins you forgive, they are forgiven. If you withhold the sin of anyone, it is withheld." What's that mean? I'm not doing it. I'm merely Jesus' lowly servant speaking His forgiveness to you. Yet He still promises to work. He still promises that the same authority the bespoke light into the universe at the creation bespeaks you righteous. Hopefully you grasp the comfort and the beauty of that certainty, Christian! But by many that's considered blasphemous.

It's also considered blasphemous by many that the forgiveness of sins would be needed at all. I've mentioned before how there's an understanding that some social

observers have come to that says that when you look at the beliefs of people in our culture, you could actually call it Moralistic Therapeutic Deism. Many of these people even claim to be Christian, but they're belief isn't really. They believe that God isn't really that involved in daily life, a sort of Deism. They believe that God's role is just to help us feel better. We pray to feel better, we seek Him when we need to feel better, and that's what He does. Finally they believe that God saves people in light of a general morality. What's that mean? It means that we earn our way to heaven. Really, it doesn't matter who you believe God is, what you believe about Him—or for that matter if you will, her, or it—just as long as you believe generically in a God and try to be good you'll go to heaven. Is there sin? Maybe, but it's not that bad.

As I say this, this really is pervasive. Teaching my classes at Concordia have proved this. I talk about this Moralistic Therapeutic Deism and a large number of the students think this is what I am saying when I talk about Christianity. What's the point? It's blasphemy to say that we have to believe in the God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It's blasphemy to say that we would not deserve for Him to take us heaven because we try hard enough. It's not blasphemy to say that Jesus is loving, that Jesus cares, but it is to say that the only way we can have communion with God is in view of the forgiveness that Jesus won for us on the cross and that He delivers to us in baptism, in absolution, in His Word, in His Holy Supper. That's all blasphemy.

But again, Christians, I hope you see the comfort of our faith in contrast to the world. I'm sure you do and that's why you're here. But let it sink in. The comfort for the Pharisees, if they looked at the temple. That's gone. It hasn't been there since 70 A.D.-something as Christians we have to see as connected to the death and resurrection of Jesus. If they looked to their own works, where is the comfort? If we look to Moralistic Therapeutic Deism, it's the same. If we ever look to ourselves, it's the same. There is no comfort. It's gone. But this One accused of blasphemy. When we look at Him, there is all the comfort in the world. Really the comfort of heaven and earth. It's the comfort of the One who was raised showing forth that your sin is forgiven, it's dealt with. It's buried in His tomb. And in His life you live forever. Dear Christians rejoice in this. It's not blasphemy, it's the greatest gift of God. Amen!