

Sermon Trinity 19 2021

October 10, 2021

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, especially these words: **“that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.”**

Through the Church Year, we have numerous lessons that look at Jesus as He shows Himself to be God in the flesh by healing people of their various illnesses and infirmities. As we see those, there is a great comfort that comes in the demonstration of Jesus’ godly power. There’s comfort in the power of the Lord over the creation, His power over the broken and fallen world, His power over the suffering of death that shows itself in these ailments. However, in this lesson we get to see all that, and something more. What do we see here? We see Jesus making the point with this healing that there is this direct connection to the forgiveness of sins. That’s what those words tell us: **“that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.”** So what does that mean? To put it in a sentence, we can say: The presence of Jesus brings forgiveness to those who approach Him in faith.

But *was ist das?* What does that mean? First of all, the PRESENCE of Jesus brings forgiveness to those who approach Him in faith. What do we mean by presence? This is hard for us to wrestle with, I think. And I make this point often, but I think we still have the baggage that we bring to the Scripture that makes it hard to understand. So where is Jesus present? When I ask that question, I often get one of two answers: heaven, or everywhere—which actually are kind of the same answer in a sense, not because heaven is everywhere per se, but because heaven is where God is, and God is omnipresent. But look at our Old Testament lesson. In fact, the Old Testament is really where we can get some insight into understanding this presence. Look at this familiar story of what we call Jacob’s Ladder. What do we see there?

Well, you likely you remember the story from Sunday School. Jacob is fleeing from Esau, and he hits the end of a day’s journey, he lays down his head on a rock to sleep, and what happens? He is given the vision of this ladder—or it could be translated as stairway—he gets the vision of this stairway to heaven with the angels ascending and descending on it. And at the top there is the Lord. Now, as a quick side note, we have to connect this to Jesus and the cross because we see Jesus speak of this in John Three saying that they would see the Son of Man lifted up and the angels ascending and descending on Him. So, we have to understand that Jesus is our stairway, our ladder to heaven. But what do we learn about the presence of God from this story? Think about it for a minute. What

does Jacob do when he wakes up? He wakes up and says, **“Surely the LORD is in this place, and I did not know it.’ And he was afraid and said, ‘How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.’”** Do you hear it?! Where is God? Somehow, He’s there at that house of God. Somehow God is at that Bethel. How? How is He there in a way that is different from how He’s everywhere? Is it like there is this concentration of His presence there somehow?

The truth is to some extent I don’t think we can say for sure. But we know the means of that presence. What do I mean by that? I mean we know that He is present there in the dwelling of His Name. Deuteronomy 12 makes this connection to God’s dwelling and His Name. And you can connect that Word and His Name, so you have a connection between this presence and His Word. In fact, you see this connection continue throughout the ages of the Kings in the Old Testament. They go sometime to make sacrifices at Bethel. Why? Because God had revealed Himself to be there.

So, what does this mean for us? Do we need to go all the way over to Bethel in Israel and find that place? Fortunately, we don’t—which is good, because there’s some conflict over where that might just actually be located. No, we don’t. So, where do we go? Hopefully, you know what I’m going to say because I say it in the Narrative Service and so often otherwise. Jesus locates Himself in the preaching of the Word and in the giving of the Sacraments. What do I mean by that? Well, you’ve heard it before but let me make the point again. Jesus comes to you in His Word, read in the lessons and preached into your ears. Jesus comes to you in the Lord’s Supper, He came to you in your baptism. Is He everywhere, so that He can take care of you and provide for you and all that? Yes, He says so in His Word—which by the way, you can only know that because of His Word. Sure, you can have ideas about what that means, but look around at the world. You’ll find no certainty of His presence there. Yes, you have your blessings—and make sure to count them. But you have your challenges and curses and trials and tribulations as well. It’s in those that this becomes so comforting. Where can you go where you know Jesus will be, never abandoning you nor forsaking you?! Here in the Divine Service in that Word and in that body and blood. Jesus is present here in a way He is not present anywhere else. That’s why it’s so important to go to Church. As I say that, I do need to note that if something properly prevents someone from being here, like their declined health or something then we bring church to them, that’s what I’m here to do. But for the rest of us, we come here to be with Jesus. Why? Because the PRESENCE of Jesus brings forgiveness to those who approach Him in faith

That said, let’s continue with forgiveness. The presence of Jesus brings FORGIVENESS to those who approach Him in faith. That’s what this Gospel lesson is about in particular,

isn't it? It's all about the authority of Jesus to forgive sins. Now, I looked and last year I made the point that it would have been shocking for this man to forgive sins. If you put yourselves in the shoes of the Scribes there, you can understand their anger. This man is saying He can forgive sins! Who can do that?! Only God, right? And so you can see why Jesus attaches those words to this healing. By healing this poor paralytic, He shows that He not only has the power to heal, but also to forgive sins. And hopefully you can see the connection. Illness, suffering, death, paralysis, those come as a consequence of death. Death comes because of sin and you see it all around. We're all sinners and so our mortality rate is 100%, this paralytic showed in his paralysis. And so Jesus showed that He could handle all of it. Why? Because He was handling the root of it: sin. And that's just what He did for you on the cross. All of your sin that has paralyzed you in your abilities to come before God, to make yourself righteous, to earn heaven, all of that is crucified on His cross. All of that He has buried in His tomb. All of that He has cast as far from you as the East is from the West. And all of that is overcome in His resurrection. He has that authority to forgive sin. Thanks be to God!

But look at how He does it. Does He just zap you with it like a laser gun from heaven? Do you just get zapped with it one day when you're walking down the street? No! He speaks it into your ear with His precious waters. He speaks it into your ear through the mouth of this broken vessel of clay who is your pastor. He speaks it into your ear and places it on your tongue in His Holy Supper. All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Him and He carries that authority on in His Church where that Word does exactly what it says, and He works it in you in those things. He comes to you in them, He speaks to you in that Word, joins you to Himself, His death and resurrection in those waters, feeds you with His presence in His Sacrament, for what? For your forgiveness! The presence of Jesus brings FORGIVENESS to those who approach Him in faith.

Finally, the presence of Jesus brings forgiveness to those who approach Him in FAITH. Now, faith is something I think we get wrong a lot in our Christian culture. Just like I said we struggle properly understanding Jesus' presence. We do the same thing with faith. We think of faith as just this acknowledgement that something is true. Do you have faith? Why yes, in my brain, I acknowledge this Jesus who lived 2000 years ago and was crucified for my sins. That's how we think of it, no? And so as long as our brain keeps thinking that thing then we assume we have faith. But Christians, the Lutherans at the time of the Reformation knew it was something different from that. Could it include that? As soon as your brain can understand those ideas, you bet. It absolutely includes that. But you can have faith before your brain is capable of articulating that thought. What they said is that faith is not an "intellectual assent," as they called it. Instead, they called it a trust.

Think about what trust means. Trust means that you rely on something. To trust in God means that you rely on Him. To trust in God means that you rely on what He promises. To trust in Jesus means that you trust that His works are what have to get you to heaven. To trust in Jesus means that you rely on His Word which tells you that, somehow, He really is present here in Word and Sacrament in a unique way. And think about what that means. It means that while your brain can say, “Yes I believe these things about Jesus and my need for Him,” but a trust means that you actually rely on Him.

To put a point to this, think about how you’ll hear people say, “If I miss church that’s OK because I still believe.” Is that true? Well, certainly we can be thankful that if we miss a Sunday it’s not as though it’s a guaranteed offramp to hell. But think about what it says about where faith is placed. At that point is my faith in this intellectual idea that Jesus died for my sins, or am I really relying on Him? As we see things picking back up after being shut down with COVID, thinking about how things are returning that we’re missing church for, you know, social gatherings, sporting events, sleeping in, the list goes on—sure His grace still can save you in the midst of that, but where is your faith at that point? In what are you trusting at that point? The strength of your intellect? Faith that trusts rests upon the promise of Jesus. It comes to Jesus knowing that it is so weak in itself that it requires the strength of Jesus who comes in Word and Sacrament. It trusts that the presence of Jesus brings forgiveness to those who approach Him in FAITH.

As I say all of this, consider that faith, then. Consider the faith these friends of the paralytic showed that brought him to Jesus. And consider the healing of Jesus that is eternal, that is that forgiveness of sins direly needed and won by Him on the cross. And consider how He comes to you in a unique way here in the service to bring it. And when the devil and the world and your own sinful desires would tell you that you should be somewhere but with your Lord on Sunday morning rebuke them all. Not because you earn forgiveness by being here. You can’t earn anything before God, but because of what He promises to give you, how He promises that He is here as the ladder to heaven, He is here in this Bethel. And that presence means something. That presence of Jesus brings forgiveness to those who approach Him in faith. Amen.