

Trinity XVIII, 2006
Text: St. Matthew 9:1-8
Trinity Lutheran, Worden, IL & Zion Lutheran, Carpenter, IL
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✠Grace, Mercy, and Peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ ✠

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

No one wants to be crippled like the paralytic man in our Gospel lesson for today. There are many things a crippled, paralytic man would miss. He might miss the wind rushing through his hair as he ran through a field or peddled a bike. He might miss taking walks with his wife or roughhousing with his kids on the living room carpet. But more than all of these, what we fear most about being paralyzed is the lack of independence – which is to say, the lack of control. Humans like to be in control, to do their own thing when they want to do it, to make their own choices.

As it is with your life in the flesh, so it is with your spiritual life as well. Who wants to admit that he is a spiritual cripple? Don't you rather want to have your own way spiritually? Don't you want to make your own rules, be in control, have independence from God's Law? Don't you often amend God's Thou Shalts and Thou Shalt Nots with the phrase if I feel like it, or if it's convenient for me. And how many times do you justify your actions in your mind by weaving excuses that you know are weak at best? When God's Law accuses you of something – of lust against the sixth commandment or of disobedience against the fourth commandment or of greed against the seventh, ninth, and tenth commandments – how often, when so accused, is the first word out of your mouth “but.” But I didn't really mean it – but I'm not as bad as some folks – but on balance I'm a good person – but it isn't fair – but it's the best I could do...

Repent. That dog won't hunt. God is not interested excuses, he is interested in holiness. Perhaps it is time to admit that you do not have the spiritual independence and control you wish you did. No perhaps about it, it is time to admit that you and this paralyzed man have a lot in common. Indeed, he is the perfect earthly picture of humanity's spiritual situation – and your situation too.

So look again at this paralyzed man and learn from him the only thing that can save you, for he is a picture of the Christian life in microcosm. First, note that he cannot come to Jesus on his own. He is paralyzed. He has nothing to offer the Lord, he can do no good thing for Jesus. He cannot anoint Jesus' feet like Mary Magdalene; he cannot follow him like his disciples; he has no alms to give to the poor; he has nothing to do at all. He has no independence at all – he is totally passive.

Or to put it another way – he has no shame, no pride that gets in the way of Jesus. For that is what our desire for control and independence really is: pride. We want the credit for our own salvation. We want to help God out – give him a hand in fixing ourselves. But all that pride just gets in Jesus' way – for Jesus wants to give to us. He wants you to receive – he wants to lay the gift of salvation in your lap. Pride, independence, and control would push that gift away and try to add its own stinking contribution in its place.

But not this paralyzed man. He has no pride to get in the way. And in that isn't this paralyzed man a perfect picture of the most Christian thing in the world: the baptism of an infant? For isn't a paralyzed man just like a baby. He has no pride to get in the way, no shame, no desire to control, nothing to give. Instead, he is perfectly giveable to. And as an infant must be carried forward to the font by his parents, so this man is carried forward by his friends. And Jesus saw their faith – the faith of the friends too – and he pronounces his verdict on the paralyzed man: “Take courage son, your sins are forgiven.”

Gift delivered. Gift received. Gift laid in the lap of the giveable to man, the prideless man, the paralyzed man, the man of faith. For that is what it means to have faith, to trust in God, to be giveable to. And the best word in that gift that Jesus gives is “son.” Again, we see a living portrait of Baptism. For is not baptism called a new birth? Yes – for this is how sons and daughters of God are born – they are brought forth from the watery womb of the Church's font as Jesus says to them, “I baptize you in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” And in that new birth there is new and eternal life - a son or daughter of God born again with sins forgiven. It is a work of God – not a work of man even though it comes through a man's hand. For it is our Lord Jesus who sends out his ministers with these words: “He who hears you, hears me.” And again, “If you forgive anyone his sins they are forgiven him, and if you bind his sins, they are bound.” Thus is Jesus content to work through the Ministry to bring his saving Word of forgiveness to the world: and the people in our Gospel text marveled that such authority was given to men – made possible because God himself became a man in

the virgin's womb that he might die for the world's sins and give us forgiveness.

And if you have the forgiveness of sins you have it all. For to win the forgiveness of sins God gave his all – yes even his own life on the cross. That sacrifice is for you. He gives it to you – even today he says to you “Take, eat this is my body given for you for the forgiveness of your sins.” Even today that work on the cross is made yours and you have in and through it the forgiveness of your sins.

And if you have that – you can be sure that you will have it all. For when the Pharisees would not believe that he could forgive sin – that is, when they would not believe that God had stepped into human flesh – Jesus gave the best proof of his authority to forgive sins by healing the man's paralysis. You see, the two go together: forgiveness and wholeness of body and soul. The one leads to the other. That is, if your sins are forgiven, it means you will rise on the Last Day in a new and everlasting body – you will run again, the arthritis will be done away with, the eye-glasses will be cast aside, you will hug your departed loved ones with real arms again. As a prophecy and sign of this fact, Jesus tells the paralytic to take up his mat and walk – and he does. Such is the power of the Word of Christ which brings the forgiveness of sins. The Word of Christ makes reality. The Word of Christ makes water give new spiritual birth. The Word of Christ says “You are forgiven” and you are. The Word of Christ says “This is my Body” and it is.

The Word of Christ is spoken to you today as well. Your spiritual paralysis is healed this day. Though you have nothing to offer, Jesus gives you forgiveness. So cling to him. Turn away from your own desires for independence and control and become like a little child, be giveable to – receive his Word – indeed, come and receive the Word made flesh as he comes to heal you body and soul by pouring into you his very self in his body and blood.

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

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Now the peace of God which passes all understanding will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

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