

Pastor T.C. Arnold
19th Sunday after Trinity
Matthew 9:1-8
October 26th, 2014

Which is easier. Sometimes this question is difficult to answer. If I were to ask, “Which is easier... to run a marathon or to hike to the top of Pike’s Peak.” You might think, both are very difficult. I’m not sure. I don’t think I could do either. If I were to ask, “Which is easier to make a glass of chocolate milk or to cut up a tomato.” You probably would think, “I’m not really sure which is easier. Both are pretty easy.” When both things are difficult – or – both things are easy, it’s hard to compare. It’s hard to decide which is easier.

In the Gospel text for today, it’s not difficult to see which is easier. And Jesus intentionally makes it that way. Jesus asks, “*For which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Rise and walk?’*” The answer is easy and this is not a trick question. It’s easier to say, “*Your sins are forgiven.*” It’s much more difficult to say, “*Rise, pick up you’re you bed and go home.*” It’s obvious. The reason, it’s easy to proclaim something about someone that we cannot see with our own eyes. We can’t tell if that man’s sins are really forgiven or not – so I can say whatever I want. However, it is a very difficult thing to say, “Rise and walk,” to a man who is paralyzed because we can see that he cannot walk. And if he does walk, then you just spoke something into existence. You just uttered words and then it happened before my eyes. This is harder because now it’s not just saying something. Now it is saying something that made something miraculous happen. That’s why it is more difficult.

Nothing seemed easy at this point in the ministry of Jesus. The Scribes and the Pharisees were after Him – trying to catch Him in a lie. Everyone else wanted a piece of Him – that is, they wanted to see a great work, a miracle, hear His teaching, or be on the receiving end of a healing. Now we aren’t given as much information about what actually happened that particular day in Matthew’s Gospel. However, in Mark’s Gospel we hear more of the story. If you remember what happened in that account of the paralytic man – Jesus was in a room and there were so many people around him that those who were bringing this paralyzed man to see Jesus couldn’t get him through the front door. So, they went up on the roof. They cut a hole in the roof. Now remember – this wasn’t a shingle or tile roof with plywood and the whole nine yards. Roofs in that day were made of brushwood packed with clay that would harden. It was sturdy but could also be penetrated quite easily. To be on a roof was not all that uncommon. You see, people often times used their roofs as sort of a patio or a deck. It was a place people would go for rest and quietness.

When they finally got him inside, and lowered this man down on his mat, Jesus simply said to the man – “*take heart, my son, your sins are forgiven.*” That’s all He said and that’s all He needed to say. Immediately, things, in the minds of all those who thought they knew everything there was to know about God, how He works, how He bestows His forgiveness – who were trying to catch Jesus in a lie – thought they had Him. So the reaction – “*‘This man is blaspheming.’*” He is not doing this by the book – He cannot forgive sins. Only God can forgive sins. How dare He claim such a thing. How dare He say those words out loud to that man.” And they didn’t even speak these words – the text says they were saying these things to themselves.

The scribes would have been happier if Jesus just said, “Rise and walk.” Anyone would like to be entertained by a neat trick. But, no, Jesus had to take it to a spiritual level. He tells the man, “*Your sins are forgiven.*” Making Him walk is okay. Who knows how Jesus is performing this trick. But telling the paralytic man that his sins are forgiven – now, that is way out of line.

Which is easier. Which is harder. It's harder to say, "Rise and walk," because words have to be put into action so that everyone can see. It's easy to say, "Your sins are forgiven," because no one could prove if they are forgiven or not. It's simple. It's easier to say, "You are forgiven." But it was much harder to "do" the forgiveness of sins. At least, as far as our Savior is concerned.

Of course, the "doing" of forgiveness means that Jesus had to die. It means that Jesus had to allow Himself to be bound and scourged – to be mocked – to be spit upon – to be condemned by His own people that He loves – to be made a spectacle – to carry a cross to Calvary and to be nailed to a cross. The "doing" of forgiveness is not easy. At least – not for Jesus.

We might say that the doing of forgiveness is not easy for us either. You know, it's hard to say, "You are forgiven" when we want to stay mad at someone. It's hard to put the hate behind us when we would like to get even with them before we make amends. It's not easy to look our loved ones in the eye, when they did something terrible, and say, "I love you. You are forgiven." It's hard because we love to hold a grudge. We love to well up with anger. We love to plot what we are going to do to get back at them. We love to play the victim – even when we are the victim – for as long as we can. We might say forgiveness is not easy. That is, we might say that... until we are the ones who need forgiving.

You are the one who messed up – and now you hope your spouse, your parents, or your friend will say those difficult, yet made easy by Jesus, words. You conveniently forgot to mention – or – you snuck around – or – you tried to hide it but couldn't. You are caught red handed. What are the words you wish to hear above all else? You know.

And what are the words that we need to hear above all else – yes even more than being able to walk? What are the words we need to hear above all else because we are talking about our eternal life and – though not thought about as all that significant by our world today – it is the most important thing because it is about our forever? What we want to hear as Christians and what we need to hear is exactly what Jesus gave to that man who couldn't even get in the door of the house. What he needed to hear is what we need to hear and it is what Jesus gave by uttering it first – deeming it the most important!! "*Take heart, my son (take heart my daughter); your sins are forgiven.*" Ah yes!! That is what we need!!

"Which is easier," asks Jesus. It's easier to say, your sins are forgiven. It's much harder to do the forgiveness of sins and you know what Jesus had to do. What Jesus did for that man, make him walk, was the much harder task at the time and was done to show how He has authority to forgive sins as well. His word and work comes from God. His word and work is the word and work of God Himself.

Beloved, the Lord has connected Himself to you through means. He has given you His Word of promise and hope. Heed that word. It belongs to you. He has given His means of Baptism and the Lord's Supper to see where His gives you the easier thing... the most difficult of task for Him... the easiest thing for you. Be in this blessed place of gifts – with your fellow believers – to receive these gifts. We need not have to choose which is easier. We know it wasn't easy for Jesus – but easy for us. Faith brings the life Christ won for us. And though the Christian life is not easy – hard in fact – We know what awaits. The gift of life and salvation has been proclaimed to us – "Rise and go." These are the words for all in this world of action today. You have been healed. That is, you have been forgiven. Amen

The peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.