

60th Anniversary of Christ Lutheran Church, Platte Woods, MO
Trinity 19 October 1, 2017 A+D
St. Matthew 9:1-8

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

"Take heart" is not a bad translation but I am not sure we hear it rightly. Literally, what the Lord says is "Have courage."

"Take heart" might sound to us like the Lord is calling the paralytic to be happy, as though He were saying, "Rejoice, my son, your sins are forgiven." That is pretty much the way the King James takes it. The venerated translation translates thus: "Be of good cheer, son, your sins are forgiven." Joy is an appropriate response to forgiveness, even for paralytics still stuck in their beds, because even those who aren't healed on this side of glory are healed in the resurrection to come. The forgiveness of sins makes this world's sorrows temporary. Better to enter into heaven paralyzed than to run full speed into Hell. That is why St. Paul can tell us to rejoice always - even in sorrow and sickness. We rejoice always because the death of Jesus Christ has reconciled us to the Father, forgiven our sins, and granted to us eternal life for free, by grace, through faith. God be praised. Isn't that why this Congregation chose the Name "Christ" for itself? Christ, King Messiah, is our Savior and Hope. He has purchased and won us from our sins and is working out our salvation. When we gain Him and His righteousness, all things are ours. That is something, indeed, to rejoice about.

But that is not what the Lord says here. He doesn't say, "Rejoice" He says "Have courage, that is, be brave, my son, your sins are forgiven."

That ought to give us pause because we don't generally tell people to be brave in happy situations. We don't say to the lottery winner, "Be brave because you are now rich and I know that is scary." Maybe we should, but we don't. Maybe that it is an indictment against our shallow view of joy but there it is. When we tell someone to be brave it is because we think they are facing difficult and dangerous situations. "We know you might get hurt or die, we know you might lose everything, but be brave."

The paralytic is called to be brave in this same way. Maybe it is more than that, but it is not less. The paralytic has just been enlisted in the Lord's army. The immediate response of the crowd is to think evil in their hearts. It is directed toward the Lord but it will turn to this man soon enough. To be baptized, forgiven, and joined to the Lord's army is to have not only comrades, brothers and sisters, but also an army arrayed against you. Those who are baptized stand alongside of St. Michael and his holy angels, to be sure, but the foe is also mighty and canny and scary.

This is why the apostles locked the door of the Upper Room on Easter Eve. They were afraid of the authorities, afraid that they would do to them what they had done to the Lord. We know that was foolish, in a sense, because God had set angels over them even as He has over us. God was their strength and shield even when He was unseen. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom but the Risen Christ bore no grudge against them from whom He died and intended them no harm. Not so the authorities, of course, but the Lord teaches us that we should not fear those who can only hurt the body.

But, humanly speaking, their fear was reasonable. Their bodies were in danger. The Jewish Berliner in 1941 has every reason to fear the Nazi authorities who insist that he make an offensive cake or have his business and his life taken from him. In fact, all of the apostles eventually did suffer at the hands of the authorities and all but one of them was tortured and executed for his faith. But by then their faith had grown and rather than hide, they embraced it for to die in Christ is to gain.

So that is why the Lord tells this paralytic to be brave. Jesus doesn't enlist any of us into the peace corp. The Lord's Church on earth is the Church Militant. There aren't any clerks or rear echelon bureaucrats. Everyone carries a cross. Everyone is attacked, tempted, suffers. Everyone fights. No one gets out alive. It is dangerous. To live in the forgiveness of sins and follow Jesus in the way of the Cross requires more than gratitude and joy. It requires courage.

Now, it could be that there aren't any Nazis within 100 miles of Platte Woods right now and none of your bakers are currently in danger of being threatened if they will not violate their consciences. But it surely seems that the next 60 years are going to be tougher than the last 60. All the signs suggest that difficult days, persecution, and danger are coming for those who confess the Biblical truths of Monotheism, Morality, and Justification by Grace - even here in the heartland. Lake Wobegone ain't safe. Niether is Platte Woods or the environs of Kansas City.

Don't get me wrong. This anniversary today is certainly cause to rejoice and give thanks. It would be wrong to be anything other than thankful for what God has done here and for the sacrifices and vision of your forefathers. The forgiveness of sins comes through means, through water and Word, bread and wine, and a man sent with authority as Christ's ambassador, and it comes in history. God's providence for today, this building, these pastors, this school and so forth, were all laid out and set up in the past. If you fail to see God's gracious hand in all of that, His guiding and leading, you are in the wrong place. Your sins are forgiven today because God prepared a place for you here. So, yes, thanksgiving and rejoicing, absolutely and foremost.

But because your sins are forgiven you also need courage. It wasn't easy to plant this congregation or raise the money for this building and the enemy hasn't quite quit. He and his army are defeated. They have lost the war but they have not yet left the field of battle. It rages on. Their defeat and the drawing near of the Last Day might even make them more desperate than ever before. The Bible does not clearly foretell the details of the end, but it does clearly tell us that it is going to get worse.

So you need courage. And what you need the Lord gives. Not courage the way men count courage, not bravado and boasting in strength, but the opposite: faith. When you are weak, when you are dependent, when you rely not on your ability to resist the enemy but are soaked in the Sacraments, the Word of God, and Prayer - then you are strong. Those who are with you are greater than those arrayed against you. The battle is already won. If the Lord allows them to kill your body, know that they cannot harm your soul. You belong to Christ. Your sins are forgiven. In Christ, you are righteous and holy and you don't belong here, you belong with Him.

That is the bravery that is needed: faith, trust. It is the courage to believe that the Bible is true and accurate and historic. It is the courage to believe that God has reconciled Himself to you in the death of the Son and will not turn His back on you. This battlefield is fading away. Soon He will say to you, "Rise, pick up your bed and come home." There He will wipe away every tear, heal every paralysis, and fulfill what He has already begun in you. Then we will rejoice always without any reservations or doubts and have no need for courage. There we will see more clearly the good that was done here, the faith and good works of your fathers mingled with yours. And then the forgiveness of sins will be known not only in your heart but also in your body, not only in the eyes and mind of God, but also in all of creation.

What a day it will be. Rise. Take up your bed. Come home,

In +Jesus' Name. Amen.