

Sermon for Trinity 19 – Matthew 9:1-8

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

Our Lord gets into a boat and crosses over the Sea of Galilee once again. He goes to His own city. Bethlehem? No, this was the city where He was born, but He did not travel there on this instance. Nazareth? No, this is the city where Jesus grew up, but His boat was not going there. Jerusalem? Nope. Christ made many travels to the Holy City and was, of course, crucified and resurrected outside of her walls. So what is the destination to which our Lord journeys, the city that is called “His own”?

It is Capernaum. This coastal city of the Sea of Galilee was a place that Christ had visited on a few occasions. Capernaum means “Village of Compassion.” How fitting that the Village of Compassion, this Capernaum, is Christ’s own city. Ironically, our Lord later denounces this city as unrepentant. Capernaum is on the list of cities He pronounces woes against for their lack of faith in spite of the miracles performed there.

And one of those miracles our Lord performed in Capernaum was in today’s Gospel. Christ heals a paralyzed man. Behold, men in Capernaum carried to Him a man who was paralyzed and lying on a bed. This man was paralyzed. Physically, he couldn’t walk or move. But he was paralyzed spiritually as well. For he has inherited the condition of all men. He was born sinful. His inner yearnings were to serve himself only. He had no thought for God. He had no thought for his neighbor. His physical condition merely personified the spiritual condition that he had and that we have, too. How often have we too, from fear, from doubt, from pride, or from apathy been paralyzed in helping our neighbor in caring for his life or possessions! How often have we forgotten to give thanks to God and glorify Him?

Contrast the paralyzed man with those men who carried him. They are not paralyzed. They are free to serve. Certainly, they have like the paralyzed man inherited a sinful nature, and do indeed on many occasions succumb to its paralysis. But these men also has something else. Faith. And this faith was a busy and active thing. These men trusted Christ as their Savior. He would make limbs, either physical or spiritual, lively once again. They trusted He would do it for them. They trusted He would do it for their paralyzed friend.

And Christ did. By His Almighty Word, He did it. “Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven.” The man is healed and so are we. Christ sees the greatest need and meets it first. Fear, doubt, pride, and apathy are conquered by Christ’s life-effecting words of forgiveness.

Still, others in the crowd doubted. They kept their doubts and their grumbling against Him in their secret circle. “This man is blaspheming.” No one can forgive sins

but God alone. No man has the authority to say what this man says. So Christ, by His divine nature, knows their thoughts. And He asks them which is easier: To say "Your sins are forgiven" or to say, "Rise and walk." In both of these instances, words effect the change. In both of these instances the emphasis is on "to say." By a word, a paralyzed man is able to rise and walk. By a word sins are forgiven. By a word sinners are declared saints.

Perhaps it was this very miracle along with the others that scribes called to mind as they railed at Christ from below: "He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the king of Israel; let him come down from the cross, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him. For He said, 'I am the Son of God.'" The prayer to the Father is answered as Christ dies on the cross: "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do."

By His death, Christ has the authority to forgive sins. By His resurrection, He confirms this fact. "Rise, pick up your bed, and go home." As certainly as witnesses saw the paralyzed man get up and walk, so also did witnesses see our Lord rise from the dead. God the Father raised His Son from the dead. His bed, the tomb, could not hold Him. Forty days after His resurrection, Christ goes home, He ascends to His throne and crown from which He came.

The crowds marveled at the miracle of resurrection. They glorified God who had given such authority to men. And we do this day as well. We glorify God who stills gives His authority to men to forgive sins. To God be the glory for instituting His office of the holy ministry where forgiveness is proclaimed by God's servants. The words of absolution proclaimed by the pastor are just as valid and certain as if Christ our dear Lord spoke them Himself. God be praised.

We have come to Capernaum today. We have come to the real "village of compassion." Christ meets us here in the church, the present day Capernaum, to give us His compassion in a compassionless world. We sinners are set free from the guilt, the doubt, the fear, and the pride that paralyzed us. We are paralyzed no more, "Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven." By this faith instilled in us, we now serve our neighbor, "Rise, pick up your bed, and go home." Glorify God who has given such authority to men. Amen.

The Peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. ✠BJF✠