

Sermon for Trinity 19 – Matthew 9:1-8

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

We have a tendency to privatize our fear, our thoughts, and our faith. We are inclined to think they have no life outside of our minds and outside of our hearts. Contrary to our private faith, our private fears, and our private thoughts is what St. Matthew writes in the 9th chapter of his Gospel. "... [S]ome people brought to [Jesus] a paralytic, lying on a bed. And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, 'Take heart, my son, your sins are forgiven.'" Faith is seen. Notice also, "... Jesus, perceiving [the scribes'] thoughts, said, 'Why do you think evil in your hearts?'" Thoughts are seen. Again, "When the crowds saw it, they were afraid, and they glorified God, who had given such authority to men." Fear is seen. Men's ideas have consequences. These are not private things. To a great extent, they are public. But even the most secret thoughts are perceived and known by God.

"Jesus, seeing their faith, said, 'Take heart, my son, your sins are forgiven.'" The question is what does Jesus see? Is He seeing into their hearts? To be sure, Jesus can see into their hearts, but is that what is being referred to here? Or does He see the actions of a paralyzed man's friends who are bringing him to the only Lord who will have mercy?

Perhaps the exchange with the scribes will give us some clarity. "And behold, some of the scribes said to themselves, 'This man is blaspheming.' But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, 'Why do you think evil in your hearts?'" It seems clear here. But the word for "knowing" in this instance is actually the word for seeing. Furthermore, from the translation we can assume that some of the scribes say this privately, that is, silently to themselves. But this can also mean that they were saying these things "among themselves". So that, in reaction to our Lord's statement that the man's sins are forgiven, some of the scribes lean in together with befuddled expressions on their faces, saying among themselves "This man is blaspheming." So what does Jesus see? Does He see into their minds and hearts here? Perhaps. But He also sees their reaction and their private meeting.

Also, the crowd who gathered to see this miracle of Christ raising a paralyzed man are afraid because of what they have just seen: the Son of Man prove His authority to forgive sins on earth. And that holy fear works wonder and awe in those people. They leave glorifying God.

Faith and actions go together. What is believed in the heart will manifest itself in works. Faith is seen. Thoughts are seen. Fear is seen. Today is Stewardship Sunday. Today you have dutifully written in your pledges of time, talent, and treasure which God has generously gifted to you. You can keep secret from those sitting next you, behind and in front of you your pledges for this upcoming year. In all actuality, they probably don't really care anyway. But remember, God sees. Faith is seen and thoughts are seen by Him. He knows what our hearts follow. He knows our hearts always follow where we put His money. Our hearts always follow where we spend God's time. Or as Christ said it, "...[W]here your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

So where are our hearts? We need not look any farther than our credit card statements, our check ledgers, and our calendars. They tell the whole story of who our god really is. And God rightly convicts us through the prophet Malachi, "Will man rob God? Yet you are robbing me. But you say, 'How have we robbed you?' In your tithes and contributions. You are cursed

with a curse, for you are robbing me, the whole nation of you." In today's Epistle reading, St. Paul provides us further exhortation: "Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need." God's gifts of time, talent, and treasure are for the benefit of our neighbors.

Mega-church pastor Joel Osteen's best-selling book to date is titled "Your Best Life Now." The sub-title of this book is "7 steps to living at your full potential." Perhaps a more appropriate subtitle would be "Your Best Life Now: Because there's nothing to look forward to after now!" But Dearly Beloved, we do have much more to look forward to in the life after this one. Our trust is not in fleeting riches, earthly honor, and a good bill of health. Here on earth we will bear sicknesses, trials, and crosses. But in the life to come these will no longer plague us. Our Lord gives us no promise of earthly riches now, but heaven is the perfect gift received by us through faith in the One Lord Jesus Christ.

This faith actively trusts, and produces something in the ones who trust. Faith produced action in the friends of a paralyzed sinner who brought him to Jesus, the only One who could help.

Faith actively trusts, and the faith of scribes was also evident by their side meeting discussing the blasphemy of Jesus. For the scribes, God's favor was not a free gift declared by Christ. God's favor was found only in their obedience to their man-made laws. Their faith was in a different god altogether.

Unlike the scribes, let's not think that all this is private: that no one can see our faith, that no one can see our thoughts, that no one can see whom we fear. Let's not think we can hide the breaking of the First and Greatest Commandment--to fear, love, and trust in God above all things, with our whole being, in heart, mind, soul, and strength. These things are seen by God. So what does God see in us? Let's consider our lives in light of the First and Greatest Commandment: "You shall have no other gods." What does God see? He sees broken, sick, and dying sinners.

And seeing this, He says, "Take heart, your sins are forgiven."

The forgiveness of sins pronounced by Jesus is the only foundation of faith. This faith actively trusts, and produces something in the ones who trust. This faith was seen in the crowd who witnessed the miracle of Christ telling the paralyzed man to walk and also the far greater miracle of the God-man forgiving sins on earth. On the cross, "Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary ... redeemed me a lost and condemned person, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil; not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death ..."

And this is no isolated historic event in times past, because this salvation breaks forth into our time. When you were paralyzed spiritually (many of you as infants), faithful friends (likely your parents) brought you to the only Man who could help. Jesus forgave your sins in the waters of Holy Baptism. You were no longer paralyzed in sin; His command was for you to get up and walk with Him. Now He carries you through this life until your walk is completed in death, when He welcomes you home. God grant us His grace to trust only in the forgiveness of sins spoken by Christ and thus be saved. Amen.

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