

The Nineteenth Sunday after Trinity
6 October, Anno Domini 2024
St. Matthew 9:1-8

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Dear sinners,

No one can forgive sins but God alone. As the Psalmist prays to God “Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight...” (Psalm 51:4a). Our sins, all of them, are against the God of heaven and earth. They are either directly against Him - having other gods, despising the Means of Grace - or indirectly - harming or refusing to help those whom He has created.. Every sin is a transgression of God’s will and commandments. This is why sin weighs so heavily on us because we know that God’s eyes have seen what we have done and said and thought. Sure, people might see, they might know. But that’s really only embarrassing. They are sinners too. If they pick up stones to throw at you, there would be stones to throw back at them.

But things are different with God. There are no stones to throw back at Him, no accusations to be made. He is perfect. His love is perfect and yours is anything but. His eyes behold, His eyelids try the children of men. His eyes behold you. And what He beholds is not pleasing to Him. He beholds your unrighteous anger. He beholds your laziness. He beholds what pages you open on the internet in the dark when no one is around. He beholds how your heart looks for peace and contentment everywhere but in Him. He beholds how quickly you toss His Word and Sacraments aside.

The Lord sees clearly. His sight isn’t clouded by excuses or justifications or empty promises. He isn’t appeased by the world’s acceptance of your sins. It’s meaningless to Him whether or not you can forgive yourself. Your eternal judgment doesn’t lie in your own hands or the hands of your friends. It lies in Jesus’ hands. It lies in the pierced hands of the One who said “Rise, pick up your bed and go home.” Your judgment lies in the hands of Him who heals sicknesses and raises the dead.

This is what the Pharisees had completely wrong. They accused God’s

Son of blasphemy, of claiming something about Himself, claiming authority to forgive sins against God. God alone can forgive. How can this son of a carpenter forgive? Certainly God wouldn't eat with sinners and tax collectors. Certainly God wouldn't heal on the Sabbath. They were paralyzed by their pride and arrogance. They were paralyzed by their hatred of God's mercy and forgiveness and so they hated everything that Jesus taught or did.

But Jesus did exactly what He did have authority to do - forgive. He looked in pity on the paralyzed man and didn't just put a bandaid on his problem. He went right to the heart of the matter - Jesus removed the man's sins and restored him to God. Now that can't be seen by the eyes. You look exactly the same to me now as you did before your sins were forgiven this morning. But Jesus wanted to remove doubt - from the paralyzed man, from the Pharisees, and from you. He has authority to forgive sins. He had taken away the man's sin and now He heals the man's body right there in front of them so that there can be no room for doubt that this Jesus is the very God against whom we have grievously sinned and is the very God who alone has the authority to forgive our sins.

There in broad daylight, God makes Himself known, shows you exactly what kind of a God His is, precisely because He wants you to know Him. He wants you to know the source of His mercy so that you know where to receive it. It is the will of God your heavenly Father that you know Him in Christ as the God of mercy and healing, the God of life and forgiveness. When our bodies are succumbing to disease and decay, when our souls are crushed by the weight of our guilt, when everything around us is devolving into chaos, when your body and soul and heart and mind are paralyzed by the fear of judgement, look nowhere else than to the Son of Man, born of the Virgin Mary. He has authority to forgive you and heal you. And not just the authority but the desire. Jesus wants to save you, because God the Father wants to save you. "Take heart, your sins are forgiven" because the Son of Man offered His innocent body and soul for your guilty body and soul.

And just as clearly and openly Jesus makes Himself known today. He doesn't want to hide from you. He has the authority and desire to bless you with immeasurable and eternal gifts. He makes Himself available to you because He wants you to have the rich blessings He brings. And He doesn't first demand that you come to Him, that you show yourself good

enough or reformed enough. You don't need to try to reach up to God. You can't. You are a sinner. Instead, God has descended to you. He has come to you in your need. He saw you lying there paralyzed by your sin, afraid of His righteous wrath, unable by any means to save yourself or ascend to Him, and He had pity on you. He raised you to new life by putting your old self to death in the waters of Holy Baptism. And what a profound mystery that He has given this authority to men, to be the mouthpieces of His absolution! That from your pastor's mouth you can hear Christ. That from one another's mouths you can hear Christ. This is why Christians rightly treasure the Office of the Holy Ministry and the opportunity to confess their sins and hear God's absolving Word. What unfathomable mercy that God would institute the pastoral office just so that sinners like you and me can hear the Word of forgiveness as often as we need to hear it! What joy to know that when the called ministers of Christ deal with us according to His divine command and pronounce forgiveness in order to fulfill His will, we can be certain that that forgiveness is just as valid and certain, even in heaven, as if Jesus Christ, our dear Lord, were standing here before us in the flesh speaking the same words, those same sweet, comforting, life-giving words.

Take heart; your sins are forgiven.

In the Name of +Jesus.

Pastor Ulmer

(We stand.) The peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus our Lord.