

The Twenty-fourth Sunday after Trinity  
10 November, Anno Domini 2024  
St. Matthew 9:18-26

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

Saints of God,

As I was studying the Gospel appointed for this week, I couldn't help but think of something that Dr. CFW Walther, the first president of the Missouri Synod wrote in the first of 28 theses he prepared on the proper distinction between the Law and the Gospel. There we read "Please note this important distinction! Every religion contains portions of the Law. In fact, some unbelievers, by their knowledge of the Law, have advanced so far that they realize that their souls need to be cleansed, that their thoughts and desires need to be purified. **But only in the Christian religion will you find the Gospel!** Other religions do not contain even a speck of it." The Gospel is everything. Without it, no one can be saved. St. Paul knows this. He writes in Romans chapter 1: "For I am not ashamed of the Gospel, for IT is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes..." (Romans 1:16) God saves us by the Gospel and the Gospel is only preached in the Christian "religion", it is what defines the Christian religion.

Okay, so the Gospel is a big deal, but what is the Gospel? What is this power of God for salvation to everyone who believes? Let's look again closely at the woman who suffered from a flow of blood for twelve years. At first glance, if we don't stop and really think about this woman's condition, we would probably just think that she knows Jesus is powerful and can heal her disease. And that's true. "With God all things are possible." Jesus is God and He has power over everything, including the diseases that cause us so much pain and suffering. The question is, knowing full well who we are and the things we have said and done, will He?

When we look closely, we see the glorious Gospel on full display. By all accounts this woman should never have been so close to the crowd that was surrounding Jesus, let alone Jesus Himself. She was unclean. The Lord speaks in great detail in Leviticus 15 about people like this woman. The short of it is that they are unclean before God. They were not allowed to go into the tabernacle while they were unclean. They couldn't go where God had promised to be, in the tabernacle. They were separated from God.

The Law of God says the same thing of you. You may not have a discharge of blood, but there are plenty of other awful things that are constantly flowing out of your heart, mind, mouth, and hands. We assume terrible things about our neighbor. Our hearts are full of hatred and anger. If someone has hurt us or done something we disagree with, we would much rather go around ruining their reputation in the dark than in Christian love, addressing them directly. We allow our lust to run wild and invite others to join us. We treat our spouses and children as hindrances to what we want rather than submitting ourselves to their needs and their good. We show great disrespect for those God has placed in authority over us. We turn our nose up at the gracious gifts of God, treating them as trite, common, boring, and inconvenient.

Going back to Walther, this is where all other religions stop. They preach nothing but Law – they can only tell you what you should be doing. The woman had no hope under the Law, because the Law could not heal her. It would have been foolish and cruel to simply say to her “Stop bleeding.” The Law cannot heal you. You cannot be healed by doing. Telling you to love God more, pray harder, buy indulgences, pray to saints, live holier lives, stop sinning – none of it helps you at all. It only points out again the painful fact that you don’t and you can’t. You cannot choose to stop being a sinner any more than the woman could choose to stop bleeding. You are a sinner.

Repent. Let God, through the Word of His Law, tell you what you are and expose your sin and then simply say “Amen”. Don’t bristle. Don’t make excuses. Don’t harden your heart. Don’t give your old prideful Adam even one inch. Repent. Become like the woman. The only thing that drove her to make such a bold move was that she knew what was wrong. And once she knew that, nothing was going to stop her from seeking God’s mercy.

What this woman sees is what stands at the heart of the Christian faith – Jesus, God’s mercy in the flesh. He is the Gospel. What drew the woman to Jesus wasn’t just that He COULD heal her, but that He actually would and WANTED to heal her. Believing and clinging to that she pushed through the crowds, risking everything to get to Jesus. All that mattered to her was Jesus. That is the Gospel. That is what sets the Christian faith apart from all others. Only the true Christian faith preaches that God is merciful and saves you without your help, input, or cooperation because He loves you. The Lord God is the helper of the helpless. He loves sinners. Jesus loves you.

But if the thundering condemnation of the Law doesn't terrify you, if you remain coldly indifferent to your sin, then this interaction isn't that big a deal. And if this interaction isn't a big deal, then neither is the Divine Service. This encounter is the Divine Service – terrified sinners desperately thirsting for the healing and forgiveness that they have heard Jesus can and does provide, longing to hear the voice of the Good Shepherd in the Word of Absolution, and tasting the goodness and mercy of God in the feast of the Sacrament of the Altar. But if you are or have been struck by God's judgement, then you know well the great struggle that was going on inside the woman. This poor woman was no doubt agonizing in her mind "I am unclean. I shouldn't approach this Lord. I certainly shouldn't address Him. I don't deserve that." But someone had preached to her the good news that Jesus is all about helping the broken, the outcasts, those who labor under their guilt and sin. And so the woman rightly silenced the terror of the Law by clinging to the Gospel, thinking "But He has what I need and He has shown that He is merciful to people just like me. There is no other way for me to find healing and restoration. If only I could just reach out and even just touch the very fringe of His garment I WILL be healed. That's what Jesus does, that's the way He wants it." And that is what Jesus wants YOU to believe about Him.

Are you afraid of your sin? Are you terrified by the evil that lurks inside that only you know about? Do you wonder if God could actually love someone like you and forgive what you have done? Then come and see Jesus. See the Son of Man who left His throne to walk through Jerusalem's dust and our filth. See the Son of God who walked to Golgotha bearing your sins and guilt. Do you long to touch even just the fringe of His garment for healing? You've come to the right place. But instead, take and eat His precious Body and Blood. See the compassion in His eyes as He lifts up His countenance upon you. That is the Gospel. Jesus is the Gospel. He is the Good News that sinners have a merciful God who will, who has, cast all their sins behind His back. Do not fear. Jesus WILL help you. That's the way He wants it.

In the Name of +Jesus.

Pastor Ulmer

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