

The Nineteenth Sunday after Trinity Sunday
St. Matthew 9:1-8
October 27th, 2019
Sts. Peter & Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church, UAC
Simpsonville, SC
Pastor Jerald Dulas

Who Had Given Such Power to Men

In Nomine Iesu!

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

Prayer in Pulpit before Sermon:

O Mighty and Everlasting God, Who by Thy Son Jesus Christ didst mercifully help the palsied man both in body and soul: We beseech Thee, for the sake of Thy great mercy: Be gracious also unto us; forgive us all our sins, and so govern us by Thy Holy Spirit, that we may not ourselves be the cause of sickness and other afflictions; keep us in Thy fear, and strengthen us by Thy grace that we may escape temporal and eternal wrath and punishment, through Thy Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, one true God, world without end. Amen.

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

We have many people in this life who help us along the way. No person is greater to us than those who help us in our Christian faith and life. We have Godparents who witnessed our Holy Baptism, and were there to encourage our parents to bring us up in the fear and admonition of the Lord God. We have parents and grandparents who brought us to the font and taught us the Christian faith both by placing into our hands the Word of God and by showing us what it means to be a Christian by how they lived, usually. We have had wedding attendants who stood by us on our wedding day and urged us to remain faithful in our marriage vows. We have fellow Christians with us today who encourage us to attend the Liturgy and receive the Holy Mass faithfully. There is also all the saints and the martyrs who serve as an example for us, like Sts Simon and Jude whose festival is tomorrow. The holy angels of God protect and defend us from all harm and danger. We have the called and ordained Ministers of the Word, who pray for us daily, and encourage us both in their words and deeds to remain faithful to the Lord God in the midst of trial and temptation. And, we have the blessed dead whose faithfulness to the Word of God gave us examples of courage, patience and trust in the Lord God. These are the many friends who bring us to the Lord Christ + Jesus, and who encourage us to live in Him with all we have and in all we say and do.

These friends are not just nice to have. They are vital and necessary. For while no man can believe for another man, no one becomes a Christian without means, or lives a Christian life by all alone. No man is an island. And so, while our faith may be personal, we do not live as individuals. Rather, we live in community—a fellowship—with the Father and the Holy Ghost Who binds all the faithful together in one communion and fellowship which truly is the Lord + Jesus Christ's holy Body. This is what we confess in the Creed—the Communion of Saints. This gathering together of believers in Christ, who encourage and assist each other in their faithfulness to the Lord God. In the Confessions this is called, "The Mutual Conversation and Consolation of the Brethren." Our conversations together in the Word of God, gives us consolation of the soul, as we are able to turn each other from looking at our good works, or becoming obsessed with our sins, to the salvation found in Christ + Jesus alone.

We all need Christian friends. And we need all these friends—especially when we have lost our way, or when we are convinced that the Lord God no longer hears our prayer or cares for our need; or when we feel that He has turned against us. Then true Christian friends cry out for us and pray the Lord God on our behalf to lend us His aid and bless us in spite of our doubts and fears. The paralytic in the Gospel reading from the Evangelist and Apostle St. Matthew serves as a good example.

It is good that the paralyzed man in today's Gospel had friends. Otherwise, how would he have gotten to our Lord + Jesus? He was unable to walk. He could not crawl. He was utterly bed-ridden. Someone had to take him. Actually, it took several men. They had to carry him on his bed to the Lord + Jesus. Only true friends will make such an effort. Only true friends will lead you to the Lord God. And only true friends will do all they can and give of themselves to make sure you get regularly and consistently the medicine of immortality found in the Word of God and the Blessed Sacraments.

But the point of today's Gospel is not that you should be a good friend so that you get honors and recognition. It is not about your good works. It is never about your good works. Does our Lord + Jesus say anything *to* these men, or do anything for *them*? No, they are only mentioned to explain why there is suddenly a paralytic in our Lord's presence. They believed the Lord + Jesus could heal him, so they brought their friend to the Lord. Our Lord + Jesus sees their faith, heals their paralyzed friend in both body and soul. And that is their reward. So, if they were looking for something also from the Lord + Jesus—a word of blessing, an invitation to join His disciples, a chance to eat and speak with Him—if that is what motivated them, then these men would have been deeply disappointed. For then they would be not true friends, but self-seeking—helping a man not for the man's sake, but for their own selfish ends.

However, it is neither selfishness nor anxiety for their friend that motivates these men to carry the paralyzed man to the Lord + Jesus. It is, instead, the firm hope and certain confidence that the Lord + Jesus—and only the Lord + Jesus—could and would do what was best for their hurting companion. They were motivated by faith—not faith in their own perseverance or in the basic fairness of God, but faith in the Lord's mercy. So, they pinned their hopes not to an idea of God's goodness, but completely trusted that Christ + Jesus is God's compassion and love in the flesh of mankind. They believed that the Lord + Jesus would see their friend's need, hear their plea for healing, and then be moved to have mercy in whatever way He thought was best.

"I am the saving health of my people," says the Lord God. *"In whatever tribulation they cry to me, I will hear them, and I will be their Lord forever."* That is what the paralytic's friends believed. That is why they act. And that is why our Christian friends bring us to the Lord + Jesus to hear His Word, because the Lord has promised to hear us in all our tribulations and trials. Our Lord + Jesus desires to heal us of the sins that burden us every day.

Perhaps the paralytic did not believe this. Whether he had faith or not is not mentioned. And theologians debate whether or not he had faith every year this pericope comes up. Perhaps he believed that God had unfairly paralyzed him. Perhaps he believed that God was punishing him. Perhaps he believed that God could and would do nothing for him. Perhaps he believed that the Lord + Jesus was not able to help him. Perhaps he believed that God only helped the strong and rich and mighty. Perhaps he did not even believe in God at all. But his friends did—and not only did they, but they also clung tenaciously to the Lord's promise to hear the prayer of the righteous and to help those in any tribulation or distress. Personally, I think the faith of this individual is not mentioned precisely because his faith does not matter. It is not about him and what he believes, but rather this reading is about our Lord's mercy. He has compassion on all men. He desires that all men be saved from sin, death and the power of the devil. His mercy is so great that He comes down from Heaven and is born as a tiny baby to a Virgin, so that He could put on our flesh, fulfill the Law perfectly, suffer our punishment, and die so that He could destroy once and for all the power of the grave. Therefore, this man's faith is not mentioned,

and only the faith of the ones who brought him to our Lord + Jesus is mentioned, because this is about our Lord's mercy for their friend.

And so, they bring their friend to the Lord + Jesus. And "*when Jesus saw their faith,*" He spoke to the paralytic. It is good that the paralyzed man had friends—such good friends who trusted that the Lord would be kind and merciful to the paralyzed in soul and spirit as well as in body.

Notice, then, that our Lord + Jesus gets right to the heart of the matter. To the man who may or may not believe in Him, and who does or does not trust the Lord to be good and do good; to the man whose faith is either weak or really strong, and who is either filled with doubts and fears, or hope and trust; whose paralysis begins in his heart—to this man, our Lord + Jesus says, "*Son, be of good cheer, your sins are forgiven.*"

Now if our Lord can say such kind and cheering words to one who may or may not believe, what do you think He says to you when you have your doubts; when your faith wavers and is unsure? If the Lord says these words to a man who can be angry with his lot in life and may be convinced that God is abusing and mistreating him, what do you think the Lord + Jesus says when your own heart leads you to false belief and despair? And if our Blessed Lord can speak such a holy Absolution to a man whose faith may be shaken, do you not think that your Lord + Jesus will be any less gracious and quick-loving to you since you are His own by Holy Baptism, and a member of His Body, and live in Him? The Lord + Jesus is just as kind and compassionate to you as He is to this man. He tells you that your sins are also forgiven for His sake—His suffering and death—for this is the purpose for which He came: to bring forgiveness to you and all mankind, and where there is forgiveness, you also have eternal life and salvation.

Notice that the Lord + Jesus does not begin with the man's physical ailment. We would expect our Lord to heal this man's most pressing need. And, He does! We erroneously think that this man's greatest ailment is his paralysis, but his greatest need is his heart—his sins. Therefore, our Lord addresses the man's heart first. He speaks words that bring the man to the life of faith first. He heals the man's soul, for this is his greatest need. Then He heals His body. Then He causes the man to walk. Then He says "*Arise, take up your bed, and go to your house.*"

But those words—the words we imagine the man really wanted to hear—are worthless unless the Lord + Jesus first heals his heart by the Holy Ghost using the words of the holy Absolution. For what good is walking if you do not walk in the Lord? And what good is healing the body if the soul is still trapped in trespasses and sin? And what good is sending a man home if he has no hope of entering the heavenly eternal home?

It should not embarrass you, then, when your friends call the Pastor to call upon you when you are sick or despairing. It should not irritate you when they urge you to come to the Lord's house and receive the Lord's sacred mysteries for the healing of your soul. And it should not distress you when you are reminded, time and again, that the angels stand over you to protect you and guard you from the wicked foe. Neither should it unsettle you when the Pastor focuses on hearing your confession, and speaking the Lord's forgiveness to you privately. For that is precisely what our Lord + Jesus does for the paralyzed man. This man's sins are not revealed. Only the man and the Lord + Jesus knows what this man's sins are, and the Lord + Jesus wishes to do the same for you in the person of the Pastor: give you a place to confess your sins privately so that only you and the Lord + Jesus know what is confessed. Those sins confessed in private confession are never divulged, but the forgiveness given is always remembered.

Yet that is not all our Lord does for you. After he was healed, the paralyzed man arose and went home. And that is your reward as well—to rise again from the dead on the Last Day, and to enter into

the heavenly eternal mansion to live in the wonderful love of our Lord God. And for this reason, our Lord + Jesus says, “Do not simply hear and believe. But also, taste My goodness. Eat My delicacies. Feast on My love and mercy. Dine at the Supper of My Body and Blood. For here I give you again the Absolution—as well as My life. Now it sinks into your bones. Now my healing salve goes not only into your mind, but also into your flesh. Here you receive not only forgiveness of sins, but also *health to your flesh, and strength to your bones.*”

Rejoice, then, that the Lord has extended such mercy to you! Sing to the Lord a new song. A song that proclaims the salvation of your soul. Rejoice that the Lord hears those who cry out to Him and does not turn away your prayers or His mercy! And rejoice that the Lord has given you such holy friends who direct you not to yourself and your own self-made faith, but to the Lord and all He benefits! And let us pray that their kindness and true Christian love, will spur you on to a similar regard for your family, neighbors, relatives and friends. In the Name of our Lord + Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit after Sermon:

Almighty and Everlasting God, Who, by Thy Son, hast promised us forgiveness of sins and everlasting life: we beseech Thee so to rule and govern our hearts by Thy Holy Spirit that in our daily need, and especially in all time of temptation, we may seek help from Him, and by a true and lively faith in Thy Word obtain the same; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

The Votum:

The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria!