

Matthew 9.1-9
19th Sunday after Trinity
18 October 2020
St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church, Topeka, Kansas

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Beloved in the Lord: grace be unto you and peace from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.
Amen.

Whose pastor was He that moment along the shores of the Sea of Galilee?

Over here in one corner you've got the scribes, eyeing Him up. He's preached to them, of course. This all happened in a synagogue. And then you've got this huge crowd around Him. We find out in Mark's report of this event that the crowd there thronged so thick that the paralytic's friends had to carry him up to the roof of the synagogue, lift the hatch to the interior—like you have to your attic—and lower the man on his cot before Jesus. And then, of course, you've got those friends.

So, let me ask it again, whose pastor was Jesus at that moment along the shores of the Sea of Galilee?

It's obvious, isn't it?

At that moment all Jesus saw was the paralytic. Lying there helpless...in his paralysis. Lying there dying...in his sins. At that moment it wasn't the sniveling scribes, the thronging crowds, or the anxious friends whose pastor Jesus was. It was the paralytic.

That's the pattern in the Scriptures, too. Think of the chain of parables in Luke: The Lost Coin, the Lost Sheep, the Prodigal Son. A woman left that coin necklace of hers somewhere—on the mantel or her dresser or on the kitchen table—somewhere—and swept and swept her dirt floor till the coin that fell out turned up. The shepherd hit the pause button on being the shepherd of the flock for the one sheep that had strayed away. And the gracious father tuned out son #1 to focus on son #2.

Why? Because if dad's going to be the dad of both, this is how he must do it. If the shepherd's going to reassure the sheep of his sincere care for them, then this what he's got to do. And if the woman's going to be the proud and careful owner of a beautiful dowry necklace, this is how she's got to take care of the whole thing.

That's exactly what happened that moment on the shores of the Sea of Galilee: to be the Chief Pastor and Head and Shepherd of His holy Christian Church, this is how Jesus did it: He took everything had—His holiness, His heaven, His life, His healing, His forgiveness of sins, His rescue from death and devil—He took it all, and He made it the full possession of this one man, of this paralytic: Take heart, My son, your sins are forgiven you. Get up, My son. Take your cot. Go home.

"My son." Not "My sons." Not "My sons and daughters." Just "My son."

What a relief and blessing to the paralytic! Sure, the general proclamation of the Gospel is great. Jesus did forgive the sins of the world! But now the paralytic can't think, say, or believe, "Surely my own sins are too great. Look at me, after all, I'm cursed with this paralysis. How could God have favor toward me?" Gone the idea that the Gospel must be for everyone else, but not him.

Because Jesus Christ had looked at *him*—*him!*—and forgiven *his* sins. Whatever they were, they were no more. Whether he had been hateful when no one else had, smug toward authority when no one else had, envious for what others had and he didn't when no one else had done that; whether he had gotten

paralysed in a robbery gone wrong when no one else had, or a fisticuffs in the streets of the Capernaem; whether he had used his paralysis and his embarrassment over it as an excuse not to go to synagogue on the Sabbath when everyone else sat attentive to hear the Word of God or had cursed God and the day he was born—no matter what it was, here he alone had a firm and final Word from God Himself: his sins were forgiven. For at that moment, Jesus had been his pastor and no one else's. Jesus had said words to him and no one else that pertained to him and were *his* to hold, and no one else. And by that Jesus had given him the blessed assurance that all His holy life, all His innocent suffering and death, all His rising from the dead, all His ascending to heaven and living in eternal glory—He had given him the blessed assurance that that was for the paralytic.

So let me drive this point home to you. This is the pattern of the Holy Scriptures. As much as you're saved in and with the whole Church, so much does the Lord Jesus want to deal with you *individually*.

Because your sins aren't so very different from the paralytic's.

You see, every sinner thinks he's a unique sinner. That whatever sins he's committed no one else has, or none quite so horribly as he. Even that's a sin. To think of yourself as being so unique as to be beyond redemption. Or of your sins as so little as not to need forgiveness.

But Jesus doesn't want that for you. Either way you end up in unbelief and condemned. You either despair over the depth of your sin and can't do anything about it, or you think your sins so little that you don't need what Jesus earned and won and merited for you—the forgiveness of sins.

That's exactly why the Lord Jesus dealt with the paralytic individually. Again, that's the pattern of the Scriptures. When Jesus healed he didn't take a crowd of ill people and heal them, He healed them individually. And when Jesus spoke the absolution, He didn't do it crowd-wise, either, but with this sinner first, and then that one, and so on. Because if Jesus suffered and died for the sins of the world, you have to be able to say He suffered and died for *my* sins.

And in His holy Church He has established just such an office. The Office of the Keys. He doesn't want you to have anything less than the paralytic had, or the woman caught in adultery, or the woman at Jacob's well, or King David when Nathan came to him: He wants you to know, He wants your faith to feed on this, that *Jesus forgives MY sins!* That's why our *Augsburg Confession* says, "Our churches teach that private Absolution should be retained in the churches." And it is. Pr. Kerns and I regularly hear confession and pronounce absolution. In fact, we both have our own father confessors—our own pastors who hear our confession. So we invite you to call us and do it. There's no shame in it. It's for sinners. And every one of you is a sinner.

But how many of you live under the burden of your sins. You hear the general absolution on Sunday and think it can't be for you. Come to private confession and find out nothing could be further from the truth.

Before we wrap up here, I just want to remind of this—you've already learned it. Open your hymnbooks to page 326 and go to the top of the left column and join me in reciting the 5th Chief Part—Confession.

What is confession? Confession has two parts. First, that we confess our sins, and second, that we receive absolution, that is forgiveness, from the pastor as from God Himself, not doubting, but firmly believing that by it our sins are forgiven before God in heaven.

What sins should we confess? Before God we should plead guilty of all sins, even those we are not aware of, as we do in the Lord's Prayer; but before the pastor we should confess only those sins which we know and feel in our heart.

Which are these? Consider your place in life according to the Ten Commandments: Are you a father, mother, son, daughter, husband, wife, or worker? Have you been disobedient, unfaithful, or lazy? Have you been hot-tempered, rude, or quarrelsome? Have you hurt someone by your words or deeds? Have you stolen, been negligent, wasted anything, or done any harm?

What is the Office of the Keys? The Office of the Keys is that special authority which Christ has given to His Church on earth to forgive the sins of repentant sinners, but to withhold forgiveness from the unrepentant as long as they do not repent.

Where is this written? This is what St. John the Evangelist writes in chapter twenty: The Lord Jesus breathed on His disciples and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."

What do you believe according to these words? I believe that when the called ministers of Christ deal with us by His divine command, in particular when they exclude openly unrepentant sinners from the Christian congregation and absolve those who repent of their sins and want to do better, it is just as valid and certain, even in heaven, as if Christ our dear Lord dealt with us Himself.

That's private confession. This is what the Lord Jesus has left His church. And in the moment of private confession, just as Jesus was the pastor of that one man alone, the paralytic, so is your pastor your pastor alone, so that you may have confidence that your sins are forgiven. Amen.

pax dei, etc.

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