

Saving the Sabbath

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[0 : 00] Let's bow our heads and pray. We praise you, Almighty God, and we thank you for the glory of your name. And we pray now that you would shine the light of your love into our hearts and by your Spirit give us a sense of what it is to sing that great song of freedom that Jesus has come to teach us to sing.

And we ask this in his name. Amen. Amen. Please sit down. Now it really is wonderful to sing and to be led by the choir and the orchestra and Terry.

And if you think it's good out there, you should sit back here. It's just wonderful. Bach, of course, wrote his cantatas to be performed in church and so what we're doing is a very good thing.

This is called Cantata No. 1, not the first cantata he wrote. Actually, it's one of his later ones that he wrote in St. Thomas in Leipzig.

When he moved to Leipzig, he nearly didn't get the job. He took a 75% pay cut. And he wasn't the first choice of the city council, nor the second choice of the city council.

[1 : 17] And I have recorded in the city minutes, one of the councillors said, quote, If we cannot have the best, we must make do with what there is.

And his name was not recorded. Or her name. This is one of the happiest cantatas, of course, and as you've been following along, it picks up the announcement of the angel Gabriel to Mary of the birth of Jesus, the joy of heaven come down.

And what Bach is trying to do is he is trying to take us beyond our experience. His goal is not just to give us breathtakingly beautiful music, but to do something more wonderful.

He is trying to write around words that echo what's happening in heaven so that our hearts will be lifted up and desire what's going on in heaven. It's not primarily written for entertainment value or as a pleasant diversion.

But it picks up all the great themes of who God is and who we are and how he loved us and saved us in Christ. So that as we go through these and we experience the joy, the idea is that we would come to know Christ more fully.

[2 : 34] That's why I had the passage read for us from Luke 5. And I wonder if you have your bulletin in front of you, if you would just turn back to page 3, to that little section, two stories from the life of Jesus.

And in both stories, what Jesus does is to give people something more wonderful than they could have imagined. Two men come to Jesus in deep need.

And in both situations, he heals and does more. And it's no accident that these stories come in Luke 5, the chapter in which Jesus pictures himself as a doctor who's come from heaven.

He says those who are well have no need of a doctor, but those who are sick, he says I've come not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. And here we see Jesus working, Jesus doctoring.

And both of these healings point beyond just the physical healing to something deeper, of course. Take the second story in the second paragraph from sentence 17 onwards.

[3 : 37] Very familiar. If you've read the Gospels, a group of men come to Jesus. They have a friend who is paralysed and they are carrying him on a bed to lay him on the bed in front of Jesus.

We don't know why he's paralysed, but we do know that his prospects are dire, that he is entirely dependent on begging and his life will be short and grim.

He is beyond human help. But he has four very good friends and they want to lay him about Jesus. They have heard about Jesus, that he can heal every kind of power of sickness and disease.

Every person who comes to Jesus he heals, whether they're blind or they're lame or they have some kind of chronic illness. And so they bring him to Jesus to lay him in front of him, and perhaps Jesus can do something.

He's beyond human help, their friend, but he's not beyond hope. Perhaps Jesus can do something to fix his useless legs. But there's a problem.

[4 : 45] And the problem is that Jesus is so popular and his preaching is so remarkable that the house where Jesus is in is overcrowded. And the friends bring their friend on the bed to the door and they just can't get in.

It's a nice problem to have. So they get creative and they go up on the top of the flat roof. They listen to about where Jesus is. When they find where Jesus is, they rip apart the roof, put ropes on the bed, and they lower their friend down at the feet of Jesus.

Now, after the earlier service, the sidesmen asked me what they should do if that happened here at St. John's. I told them it was their job to stop it from happening.

And we don't have Jesus quite in the same way. But it is an amazing moment, isn't it? Jesus is preaching, pressing crowd. And suddenly this guy comes down and everyone holds their breath. What is Jesus going to do? Verse 20, about five lines down in the second paragraph. When he saw their faith, he said, Man, your sins are forgiven you.

[6 : 07] And that is a massive disappointment to them. I mean, how could Jesus get it so wrong? Isn't it obvious he needs his legs fixed?

And I imagine the guy who's lying there, listening to Jesus say, your sins are forgiven, is saying to himself, that is very nice, Jesus, but in case you hadn't noticed, I've got a much bigger problem. I can't walk.

And the guys up on the roof are calling down and saying, it's the legs, you know, fix. And I think many of us come to Jesus with a very clear sense of need and what we want him to do for us.

And there comes a point in your relation with Christ where it becomes clear that what you think you need and what he thinks you need is a different thing. And what Jesus does here and what he always does is something much more wonderful than we can imagine.

He goes to the root of the problem because at its bedrock, at its foundation for every single one of us, behind how I think about myself and how I live my life and how I deal with others is how I relate to God.

[7 : 17] That's why Jesus calls himself the divine doctor. That's why he says, I haven't come to call righteous, but sinners to repentance. He didn't come to say, try harder, do better, here are a few more rules to follow and then you'll ace the final test.

He says, I've come to do something very different. I've come to give a different diagnosis that underneath your anxiety and your boredom and your consuming is a virus, it's a disease, if you will, where we have tried to separate ourselves from God and play life on our own and run our world and run our lives in our own ways and this is of course what the Bible calls sin.

And that is why the Pharisees and the teachers of the law are so upset. They're appalled with what Jesus says. In verse 21, they began to question saying, who is this who speaks blasphemies? It should be said, who is this who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone? Who does this guy think he is? The forgiveness of sins is God's prerogative alone.

Let me give you an illustration. I'm going to leave the violins alone this time. Just imagine Sarah's cello. Is an Italian cello worth millions of dollars? And I ask her to borrow it for a little while and because Sarah's known me for a long time, she says, sure.

[8 : 52] And I bring it back to her and it's full of holes and the strings are all broken and it's nearly ruined and I said, I really needed it for an important game of street hockey.

I'm very grateful and we wouldn't have won without it. And while she's standing there gasping, Terry comes over and says, David, I forgive you. To which Sarah says, it's got nothing to do with you, Terry.

How's my cello? Forgiveness is mine. You see? That is why the Pharisees ask the right question, who is this who forgives sins?

But the problem is they cannot possibly imagine that Jesus can be the Son of God and the Son of Man. And what they have done is they have reduced the Old Testament to law, to a kind of religion, to a system of control where they keep God at a safe distance in a little box which they have defined.

You see, this is the difference between religion and faith. religion says, I do these good things therefore God will accept me. And faith says, God has accepted me therefore I can do these things.

[10:11] And religion, it's one of the commonest ways we live our lives. We make rules for ourselves. Sometimes we don't even know we're doing it. And I obey my rules and you don't obey my rules and therefore I feel better and better and better about myself.

If I just say the right things and do the right things and believe the right things then God is going to have to give me what I want. But forgiveness is not about control.

Forgiveness is acknowledging I'm not in control and it's knowing that God is in the place of control. I think that's the point of the first story in the first paragraph in verses 12 to 16.

Here is a man full of leprosy to terrible medical term. His life is characterized from beginning to end by uncleanness. And you know what the law says to him?

You can't touch anyone. The law says to him you have to be separate from your family, from your community, physically, spiritually. The law says that wherever you go you have to call out in front of you unclean, unclean because you are contagious.

[11:20] He was beyond human help. And the reason this story is placed in this context is that leprosy is a terrible and devastating picture of our spiritual condition.

It's a disease that is progressive and debilitating because it numbs my sense of pain. And this man is overwhelmingly aware of his uncleanness.

And he knows that Jesus is powerful enough to heal him. He just doesn't know if Jesus is good enough and he says if you will make me clean. And if you look down at verse 13 what does Jesus do?

Jesus does something nobody has done for him for years. He stretches out his hand and he touches him and he says I will be clean. And immediately instantly all the corruption all the uncleanness all the alienation all the ostracism is lifted.

and Jesus restores him socially and sends him back to the priests and says make a sacrifice as a proof to them a proof not that he's clean a proof that now that Jesus has come there is someone who has power infinitely greater power than all the law.

[12:41] All religion and all the laws even though they are good cannot bring healing they cannot bring cleanness. all they can do is show us how deeply we need the forgiveness of God.

It can only be through Christ. And that is why Luke puts these two things together the man who has leprosy and the man who is paralyzed who is there lying in front of Jesus they are both devastating pictures of who we really are and the men of religion who are standing there are fuming and are deeply offended.

And Jesus turns to them in the house and says which is easier to say your sins are forgiven or rise and walk. And of course it's probably easier to say your sins are forgiven because you can't check inside someone's heart to know if they are.

But I think the question is meant to make the men there reflect more deeply. It is a in a sense it is a reflective question because both the forgiveness of sins and the healing of this man are utterly humanly impossible.

You and I we cannot heal someone who has been paralyzed for life we cannot forgive someone's sins. And here we come to the heart of the passage and I read to you from verse 24 Jesus is speaking but that you may know that the son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins.

[14:09] He said to the man who was paralyzed I say to you rise pick up your bed and go home and immediately he rose up before them and picked up what he'd been lying on and went home glorifying God.

It is astonishing. And what is more astonishing is it the healing or is it the forgiveness of sins and the point is that both are the work of God.

And why does Jesus say the son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins? It is because the Bible's view is that history and our lives are traveling towards a destination and there will come a day when God will bring the world to an end when he will raise all those who have died and he will bring them to himself and forgiveness is the ultimate verdict of the last day on my life and your life. It is something that belongs to the future and it's only God's to give. And what is so stunning about what Jesus says here is that because Jesus has come we can know the verdict of the last day now. That we don't have to wait until the last day. We don't have to guess what God will say. But Jesus has come with the verdict in his hands God will forgive your sins. That is why he says I have authority on earth to forgive sins.

[15 : 40] This is the decision that heaven makes but it comes to earth through Jesus Christ. I think that is wonderful news don't you? that God is willing to forgive our sins through Jesus Christ.

That we are able to know complete forgiveness at all times and in all places through him. If you knew the future, if you could know three years into the future, you could make yourself more money than anyone else in the world.

Jesus not only knows three years, he knows the end. And he doesn't use it to make himself rich. he uses it to announce that we might be free from our sins.

And it is a wonderful thing isn't it that Jesus gives this man back his legs. It is a tremendous thing but it is a much, much more wonderful thing that he gives him the forgiveness of his sins.

If you could interview this man two years after that day and say to him, what happened? He will say it was wonderful, Jesus gave me the ability to walk and dance.

[16 : 47] But even more wonderful was the forgiveness of my sins. And if you could interview him two thousand years after that day or twenty thousand years after that day, he would say to you, the legs were important but I began a new life with God that day and I am very grateful.

And I think this is something of what Bach intends, when he calls this cantata, how brightly shines the morning star. The morning star is the star that's low on the horizon just before the dawn and it reflects the light of the coming sun.

Jesus is the morning star. He has authority on earth to forgive sins. He brings the light of God's future to us. And he demonstrates his power by healing this man and restoring him in front of the crowd.

A man who'd been a slave in his own body and a slave to sin is released from both. And Jesus heals his body to demonstrate the truth that his sins are forgiven.

And I don't think there is anything that can be compared with the forgiveness of our sins before God. It means that my relation with God is no longer based on my performance but on his performance.

[18 : 14] That what's really important is not my love for God but his love for me. That my faith is built not on what I do but what he did. That what's important is his grasp of me not my grasp of him.

I don't have to make myself acceptable to him. I am accepted by him. I don't have to justify myself. He has justified me. And in a few minutes Aaron Roberts is going to stand and speak about a group that we run here at St.

John's for people who would like to pursue this further. The lovely thing about both the leper and the paralytic is there's no hint of self-justification.

They didn't go home that day saying look what I achieved. What they did is they received what Christ offered them. They heard the words that Christ said and they believed that he had the power to do it.

And that is what it means to follow Christ. It means to hear him say I have authority on earth to forgive sins and to turn away from sins and to ask him for forgiveness.

[19 : 25] And his authority remains just as strong today. For after this day if you keep reading the gospel he was raised up on a cross and he died and on the third day he rose again.

And after he rose again he spoke to us about forgiveness of sins. And so the passage finishes in the last verse. Amazement seized them all and they glorified God and were filled with awe saying we have seen extraordinary things today.

Extraordinary. Beyond expectation. Beyond imagination. salvation. We see Christ restore physically. We hear the voice from heaven that we will all hear on the last day saying he is able to bring forgiveness and freedom.

And so we place our trust in him and we ask us to forgive him of our sins, to bring freedom and to follow him. He is the bright morning star. He has authority on earth to forgive sins.

Amen. Let's kneel for prayer. Our God and Father our hearts have been lifted up as we have shared in these beautiful choruses and we have experienced the reality of your presence amongst us.

[20 : 56] Father we thank you too for your word and for the way that a text which was written over 2,000 years ago can speak clearly into our hearts today.

We thank you for your servant David and for his opening of the word to us. Father we recognize our desperate need of healing from the rebellious nature that is our reality.

We humbly come into your presence and pray with the leper. Lord if you will make me clean. And Father cleaned and forgiven may we give you the glory and be a community where Jesus is present

and where all are welcome.

Lord in your mercy. Father your world is troubled and many still have not heard of your invitation to all who are weary and heavy laden.

We thank you for the ministry of Kirsten and Living Waters to those who are emotionally and relationally wounded in the knowledge that there is no hurt, no area of brokenness beyond the reach of your grace.

[22 : 13] We pray also for Dan and Fran Goal who care for those struggling with addictions and despair. May they be a source of your hope to those who have given up on themselves.

Lord in your mercy. Father in these momentous times for Anglicans we thank you for the support and encouragement of the communion in Africa, Asia and South America.

We pray for the Anglican Network in Canada Synod starting next week in Burlington. Bless our delegates from St. John and our Bishop Donald Harvey as he provides leadership.

May the Synod be a place where those in the Anglican Church in Canada who hold your word as a standard above cultural norms be strengthened to preach that word with boldness.

Lord in your mercy. And Father we pray also for St. John's missionaries faithful to the Great Commission to make disciples of the nations.

[23 : 19] For Heather Thompson translating scripture in Burkina Faso. Brian McConachie seeking to empower the Cambodian Church to care for the abused and broken. And Heather Bellamy working with widows in Afghanistan.

Lord in your mercy. Father there are those in our midst who are facing serious illness, personal and marital breakdown and even death.

some of us come with worries for ourselves and our loved ones that are overwhelming and we do not know which way to turn. As your children we place these concerns in your capable hands and look to you for healing.

We lift up to you particularly Maynee, Maynee, Rowan, Fiona, Paul, and Michael, and also Ben and Nancy on Vancouver Island.

And for those whose names are known to you and have not been mentioned here, we pray. Amen.

Lord in your mercy.

[24 : 34] Father, may we continue to encourage and support one another that St. John's may be a caring fellowship, welcoming strangers, and seeking by your strength to be a source of salt and light in this great city.

We ask these things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. Amen. Amen.