

Trinity XIX

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Date: 15 October 2023

Preacher: Father Randall Russell

[0 : 00] In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen. In this morning's Gospel, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ heals a certain paralytic of his paralysis in order to prove that he, the Son of Man foretold by the prophet Daniel, truly does have the power to forgive sins.

But what I find truly most fascinating about this morning's Gospel text isn't the fact that our Lord can perform miracles.

No, we know that. But what I find truly fascinating is how the people, how the people themselves respond to our Lord's miracle.

For the people who witness that miracle don't say something like, praise God for a great prophet has risen up among us. Or, hallelujah, God has finally visited his people.

No, they don't say that. Others did. They don't. But what I find truly fascinating about this morning's Gospel is that the people all marvel and glorify God, who, as the Gospel text reads, has given such power to men.

[1 : 30] Now, did you catch that? This morning's Gospel tells us that the people all marveled and glorified God, who had given such power to men.

Men, as in plural. Men, as in many. Men, as in more than just one. For the people do not marvel and glorified God, who has given such power to a man.

Singular. No. This morning's Gospel text tells us that the people all marveled and glorified God, who had given such power to men.

And why is this small detail so important? Well, it is important because Matthew chapter 9 sets the stage for what is going to come next in Matthew chapter 10.

And in Matthew chapter 10 we read, And when Jesus had called his twelve disciples to him, he gave them, that is, those twelve men, he gave them, our Lord gave them, the power over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all kinds of sicknesses, and all kinds of diseases.

[3 : 02] And why did our Lord do that? Well, he did it. He did it in order to prove that the apostles and all their successors would also in time be given the power, not only to heal, but to forgive sins.

For in John chapter 20, Jesus tells the apostles, Peace be to you. As the Father has sent me, that is Jesus, so I send you.

And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and he said to them, Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone their sins, they are forgiven.

And if you retain anyone his sins, they are retained. And the main point I wish to make in this morning is the same thing that amazed all the crowd in this morning's gospel.

And that is, that God has given the healing power to forgive sins, and to withhold the forgiveness of sins, to men.

[4 : 18] For God gave this power first to the apostles, and then to their successors, which today we call bishops. And under the authority of such bishops, then to priests, which is why priests can hear confession and pronounce absolution as if from God himself when they say, The Lord has put away all your sins.

For dear Christian friends, do not underestimate the craftiness of your adversary, the devil, whose desire it is to separate and to isolate you from both God as well as one another.

And one of the ways the devil does this is through fear, guilt, shame, or apathy.

For sometimes, sometimes when we read the Holy Scriptures, we have doubts. We read them in private, and we say to ourselves, How could God ever love me?

And if we don't doubt God's love for the world, then sometimes we doubt God's love for ourselves. But this is one of the reasons why God has given us the Lord's Supper.

[5 : 45] For when we partake of those holy mysteries, when we eat of Christ's body and drink of his blood, we need not doubt, but know for certain that this is the body and this is the blood of Jesus Christ given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.

But even after this, some still might doubt. And so in our heart of hearts, we say things and think things like, Oh, if the priest only knew the truth, he would not be so quick to dispense God's mercy upon me.

Or, Oh, if the congregation only knew what I have done or what I have thought, they would not be so quick to call me their brother and sister in Christ.

Or we think things like, Oh, if anyone knew, if anyone ever found out about my adultery or my idolatry, the sick perversions of my heart, the depravity of my soul, the murderous thoughts of hate that I hide away deep within my mind, the lies I have told, the truth I have not told, all those dark deeds that I have done in secret, my quiet fascination with wickedness, and my silent disgust for righteousness, and my hidden love for all things other than God.

Or worse, we might tell ourselves things like, I'm fine. I mean, I'm pretty much Mary Poppins.

[7 : 41] I'm practically perfect in every way, and what sins would I ever have to confess? And to people such as these, to those who are paralyzed by fear or guilt or shame, or to those who have become so apathetic towards sin that they no longer see any need for absolution, to people like these, I can offer no better advice than this.

Conquer your fear, your guilt, your apathy, and your pride, and go to private confession. Receive absolution, and afterward, marvel and glorify God who has given this healing power to forgive and resolve sins to men.

For the good news here is that if no man is above the call to repent and to confess his sins to another, then neither is any man beyond the reach of God's mercy or the comfort of his spoken absolution.

For God has established these three means in order to strengthen and comfort all his baptized children. and these three are holy scripture, the Lord's supper, and private confession and absolution.

[9 : 26] And a wise man will regularly make use of all three so that he might be well prepared to stand against all the wiles and temptations of the devil.

after all, in this morning's gospel, our Lord Jesus Christ heals a certain paralytic of his paralysis in order to prove that he, the Son of Man, truly does have the power to forgive sins.

to forgive sins. But as a people of faith, we already know that. Yet what a lot of people of faith don't know is what the crowd in this morning's gospel seemed to understand.

And that is that God has given the power to forgive sins to men. So today, when you hear the priest say words you've probably heard a thousand times before, when you hear the priest say, Almighty God, our Heavenly Father, who of his great mercy hath promised forgiveness of sins, to all those who with heart and repentance and true faith turn to him, have mercy upon you, pardon and deliver you from all your sins, when you hear the priest say those words, do not doubt that ordained man's absolution, do not be paralyzed by fear or become lethargic with apathy, but marvel and glorify God, who has given such power to men.

Therefore, as a called and ordained servant of God, who serves under the authority of his bishop, I say to you this morning, awake from your apathy, arise from the paralysis of fear, guilt, and shame, confess your sins, and receive absolution, and in the loving and merciful words of our Lord and Savior, go now and sin no more.

[11 : 46] In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.