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Luke 5:17-26

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<sup>17</sup> One day Jesus was teaching, and Pharisees and teachers of the law were sitting there. They had come from every village of Galilee and from Judea and Jerusalem. And the power of the Lord was with Jesus to heal the sick. <sup>18</sup> Some men came carrying a paralyzed man on a mat and tried to take him into the house to lay him before Jesus. <sup>19</sup> When they could not find a way to do this because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and lowered him on his mat through the tiles into the middle of the crowd, right in front of Jesus.

<sup>20</sup> When Jesus saw their faith, he said, “Friend, your sins are forgiven.”

<sup>21</sup> The Pharisees and the teachers of the law began thinking to themselves, “Who is this fellow who speaks blasphemy? Who can forgive sins but God alone?”

<sup>22</sup> Jesus knew what they were thinking and asked, “Why are you thinking these things in your hearts? <sup>23</sup> Which is easier: to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up and walk’? <sup>24</sup> But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.” So he said to the paralyzed man, “I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.”<sup>25</sup> Immediately he stood up in front of them, took what he had been lying on and went home praising God. <sup>26</sup> Everyone was amazed and gave praise to God. They were filled with awe and said, “We have seen remarkable things today.”

The Word of the Lord. (**Thanks be to God**).

A man sits by the side of the road hurling insults and obscenities at passersby.

A killer jams a knife in the back of his unsuspecting victim.

A man hits the bottle hard and then hits his wife even harder.

We easily identify these as sins...

Pretty nasty sins in fact...

Offences against other people and offences against God.

Yet we do not read anything of this sort from the character in our story this morning.

We don't know much about the man:

Who he is;

Where he comes from;

If he has any family;

If he committed any crimes;

We don't know if he is friendly or rough around the edges...

All we know is that he has an obvious need:

He's paralyzed.

He doesn't have the ability to move certain limbs...

He can't walk.

His presenting issue is paralysis.

So we would think that any healing taking place would be directed towards his body...

The man is lowered through the roof and placed right into the middle of the crowd...

Right in front of Jesus.

And being the Great Physician that he is...

Jesus addresses not his presenting issue—

He doesn't address the paralysis—

He addresses a greater need.

“Your sins are forgiven.”

Doesn't it seem like this comes out of left field?

Like Jesus was off in his mind somewhere else...

Then he snaps back to and says the first thing that comes to mind?

“Oh, your sins are forgiven!”

This man was not caught cheating someone out of their property.

He wasn't caught stealing the neighbor's goat.

He didn't kill anyone (that we know of)...

And he didn't speak blasphemies against God.

And yet what Jesus chooses to address are the man's sins:

“Your sins are forgiven.”

When I begin the sermon writing process...

I read through the passage a couple of times and I ask questions.

I just allow my mind and my spirit to go...

And I write down anything that seems interesting, curious, important or confusing.

When I read this passage my defenses immediately went up:

(It was more of an objection than a question though)

“How can this man's sins be forgiven?”

He didn't confess any sin.

He didn't repent.

We're not even sure if the man had faith:

“When Jesus saw *their* faith (plural), he said, ‘your (singular) sins are forgiven.’”

‘Their faith’ refers back to v. 18: “*Some men* came carrying a paralyzed man...”

We know that the men carrying him had faith...

But it's ambiguous if this man himself had faith.

So here I am, objecting in my mind, asking “How?”...

“How is this possible?”—

And the Pharisees sitting there are asking “Who?”—they're also objecting!

“Who is this man claiming to forgive sins?”

“Who is this man speaking blasphemy?”...

“Claiming to do what only God can do!”

“How?” and “Who?”

Both questions in this situation that put up a barrier to the grace of God.

Both are questions that object to what Jesus says to this man:

“Friend, your sins are forgiven.”

They ignore the authority of Jesus to forgive sins—

His right to offer grace.

Jesus uses this odd situation as a teaching moment.

First for us.

This paralyzed man comes to Jesus with none of the “standard” sins.

He’s not brought in for cheating, lying, stealing...no sexual immorality.

He’s brought in with the expectation of being physically healed.

But, like a skilled doctor who detects a malignant cancer spreading unseen throughout an otherwise healthy body...

Jesus sees to the heart of this man’s condition.

He sees his sin.

And it’s not just this man with sin...

It’s *our* sin.

We are in the same condition apart from Christ.

We may present as well-adjusted individuals living in this broken world...

But our lives are full of a debilitating sin.

Not only is it the actions that we take and the words that we say...

Sin is not just doing something wrong.

It’s at the core of our condition.

We were originally created good, in God’s own image...

Created so that we might know him (Q&A 6).

Have relationship with him.

But because of the first disobedience we are now all born in a sinful condition.

Eugene Peterson says it like this:

“A catastrophe has occurred. We are no longer in continuity with our good beginning. We have been separated from it by a disaster. We are also, of course, separated from our good end we are, in other words, in the middle of a mess.”

“Because of Adam’s sin we have gone into exile...

We have become foreigners to God...”

Separated and sent away from our Father, the source of all life. (Plantinga, 22)

The Catechism uses the word “misery” to describe our situation...

We may not always feel miserable—

Before Christ we may not have felt the misery of being separated from God—

But we’re told that apart from Christ we are dead...

Dead in our sins and dead in our trespasses. (Eph 2)

It’s as if we’re all born with a malignant disease...

A disease that pulls us down and leads us to death.

Thanks be to God, Jesus comes to heal, save, and rescue.

Jesus looks at this man just lowered through the roof...

He sees past his physical condition...

And he says,

“Your sins are forgiven.”

Wow.

Jesus sees past *our* limitations.

He knows our doubts and our fears...

He knows our lack of faith...

And the poor condition that we’re in...

He looks at us and has compassion on us:

“Friend, your sins are forgiven.”

“No longer will you be alienated from the source of all life and joy.”

“Your sins are forgiven, and you’re brought back into the family.”

I’ve healed your disease. (PAUSE)

We don't know what role the paralyzed man's faith played.

He could have begged these men to carry him to see Jesus...

Convinced that Jesus could heal him.

Or he could have been included in the words, "Jesus saw *their* faith."

We're left with a little ambiguity in this story...

But what we do know is that Jesus forgave his sins and confirmed it with a physical healing.

Jesus forgave his sins, mended his broken spirit, and then mended his broken body.

This same Jesus does the same for us...

Forgiving our sins and bringing us from misery to joy...

From death to life. (PAUSE)

The Pharisees and religious leaders also learned a little something that day.

They asked the question, "Who is this fellow?"

To them Jesus was someone to keep an eye on.

See, the Pharisees were responsible for making sure that the law was interpreted correctly.

They wanted everyone to stay on God's good side...

So they made sure that people followed the rules of Scripture.

They come from far and wide, some even from Jerusalem (over 100km journey)...

To check out this Jesus guy and his teaching...

To make sure that it's in line with what they taught.

For Jesus to declare forgiveness of sins, especially in their presence, is a "no-no."

It elevates Jesus to the same level as God...

A blasphemy deserving the punishment of death.

But the teachers learned that this man had authority:

"So that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins, I tell you get up, take your mat and go home."

Jesus is confirming that he in fact does have the authority to forgive sins.

Many of us know that we have sin in our life.

We walk through life with weights tied around our neck.

We feel guilty about what we said or didn't say to mom before she died.

We feel guilty about going behind closed doors and committing that immoral act...

We feel guilty because deep down we know that we're selfish...

We feel guilty because we know we could do more with our time and money...

We feel guilty about making that one awful decision that we have to live with now for the rest of our lives...

We walk around feeling the weight of sins past...

Like we're wearing a backpack with a bunch of rocks in it.

Many of us know that we have sin...

We know misery...

We don't need convincing of it...

What we need though is the assurance that our sins are forgiven.

Jesus comes to us in this passage and says, "I do have the authority!"

He says to us:

"My death *is* sufficient for you."

"I am God in the flesh, and by my wounds you are healed."

"Believe in me!"

"For this reason I came into this world:

To free you from oppression; to give sight to the blind; and to release you from the sin that binds."

"You have sin, and I've come into the world to save you from it."

Jesus meets us in our sin and broken condition with his salvation. (PAUSE)

We first know our misery or our sin...

Then we experience the life-saving work of Christ on our behalf...

And so finally we're led to respond...

Guilt, grace, gratitude.

Sin, salvation, service.

I told you before that we didn't know much about this paralyzed man.

But I'm going to tell you how I think it went.

This is not in the Bible...but I just have a hunch.

Four men from Capernaum saw Jesus when he was there.

They saw him drive out an evil spirit from a man...

They heard him teach and they saw him heal.

They were astonished by his words; his humility; his gentleness; and his authority.

The Spirit led them to believe that this man Jesus was in fact sent from God.

He was all he claimed to be.

Soon after this the four saw a crippled man on the roadside begging for food.

Changed by their encounter with Jesus they rushed up to the man and began telling him about all that Jesus had done.

These men had been changed...

And now they were going out and sharing the good news.

Unable to contain their excitement and with the permission of the man...

They hoisted up his bed with him on it and went and tracked Jesus down.

Along the way they continued to share about Jesus...

And eventually this paralyzed man began to desire this meeting...

"Could this man Jesus really heal me?"

"These guys seem convinced...is this for real?"

The prospect seemed too good to be true, but he felt something move in him as he heard these men talk...

The seed of faith.

Finally they found where Jesus was and they saw the crowd surrounding him...

One of them saw a ladder leading to the roof:

"Come on, I have an idea."



And well...

We know the rest of the story.

Brothers and sisters, the good news is that God came into this world to save us.

He loved us so much...

And wanted to be in relationship with us so badly...

Wanted to set things right.

That he sent Jesus to forgive our sins by his death and resurrection.

He took those heavy weights of guilt from around our neck and set us free.

So now we are able to live out of this new life...

To respond to his grace.

We are free to share the good news with others...

Share our excitement about God's goodness with those around us.

We are put in positions to lead people to faith and break down barriers to his grace.

We've been set free and sent on mission to share his love and goodness with the world.

Let us too, go out praising God for all he has done.

Amen.