

Sermon: Forgiveness of sins

Mark 2:1-12

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In our Gospel reading we heard that Jesus returned to his home in Capernaum, after a tour of preaching and healing people in Galilee. Maybe this was a home that some friends of Jesus had made available to him, to relax somewhat from his draining period of ministering to the people.

But no holidays for Jesus.... Also in Capernaum people came in large numbers to listen to him. They must have heard many good stories from what he did all over Galilee, and of course they were curious. And Jesus preached.

Four friends brought a man who could not walk to Jesus. This incident showed in three manners that Jesus is truly the Son of God.

Jesus healed a lame man:

Jesus forgave the sins of the man:

Jesus knew the minds and hearts of the people:

1 Healing

First something about the healing of this paralytic man. Being sick is bad, and being permanently sick is awful. It is great when God blesses us with good health, and if we have this, we should thank God for it.

When we are not healthy, we do all we can to get healed again. The industries that provide health care can always be assured of good profits because all people get sick, and we all fight disease with all of our means.

In the days of Jesus there were also people practicing medicine – nowadays many of those would be considered charlatans, and those could not heal this paralytic man.

So the friends of that lame man want to bring him to Jesus. They had heard stories of how Jesus supposedly healed many people while on his campaign in Galilee, and they obviously hoped that Jesus could also heal their friend.

It was too busy at the place where our Lord was speaking, so they could only reach Jesus by lowering the man on his mattress through the roof.

Like in many villages here in Egypt, the roofs of houses in Galilee were flat, with beams and diagonal rafters. It would be overlaid with brushwood, with branches of trees, and then with a thick layer of mud on top of it. Quite

messy to tear those roofs open, but not too hard.

You wonder how the people inside responded when pieces of mud and brushwood began to fall down as the roof was opened. 'Hey are you crazy, stop it', some must have shouted.

But eventually the lame man was lowered in front of Jesus. Jesus heals the lame man, as he saw the faith of the man and of his friends.

All the work they did to get the man close to Jesus showed that they really expected Him to be able to do something. This was their faith. Their conviction.

Jesus healed the man just by speaking the word. He shows here the same creative, or we should maybe say, re-creative power that only God has.

In the very beginning, God said 'be', and thus the world was made. Now Jesus only speaks the word, 'be healed', and the man is healed.

All over the Gospel we read of such miracles that Jesus did, and they all point to his divinity. And also to the desire of God to see mankind healed. They underline the desire of God, the love of God, for our wellbeing. That is very good to know!

Only God himself is able to instantaneously heal a paralytic person, and to make him walk away healed.

The apostles, later in the New Testament, also did miracles, and even today, miracles happen. But not by people who in their own authority say: "Be healed", but by people who pray God to intervene, by people who invoke the authority of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The difference with Jesus was, that he spoke with authority. In His own authority. So each and every miracle He did, pointed to his divine nature. Here God himself was at work. Because only God is the creator and re-creator of life. No one else can by his own powerful word, change matter.

2 Knowing your heart

The scribes, the theologians of those days, had grave doubts about Jesus. Jesus had told the paralytic man that his sins were forgiven, but how dare He say that! Impossible! They kept their thought to themselves, but the ideas went on and on in their minds.

“This man is blaspheming; he assumes he has powers that only God has. How can this fellow talk like this! Forgiveness is the prerogative of God!”

And maybe they also thought, “Easy to offer forgiveness, Jesus, the man comes for healing and you offer forgiveness. Who in the world can control that God indeed forgives his sins?”

Jesus understood what was going on in their minds. He perceived in his spirit what was going on in their minds. He penetrated straight into their hearts and minds. He knew their thoughts.

But only God knows the secrets of our hearts. And here we see that Jesus also knew the secrets of their hearts. It is not a strange conclusion, therefore, that Jesus and God his Father are so intimately related that we speak of one and the same divinity. Jesus is the Son of God, yes He *is* God.

He knows our minds and our hearts. What consolation this is for those who have been reconciled with God! God knows me inside out... and he wants the best for me. He desires my healing! That is great comfort in good times and in bad times.

He knows every detail of your life... that makes prayer so easy. You do not have to explain God what your problem is, or what you are struggling with. Because he already knows every detail of it even before you did. What comfort that God knows us inside out. And he wants the best for us.

And Jesus, Son of God, yes God himself, naturally displays this same divine character. He knows the people he meets in a manner that goes far beyond what is normal. It even goes beyond the paranormal. His knowledge of you and I is the knowledge of the Creator of heaven and earth.

Often we can be so twisted in our own thinking. We have so many matters on our mind. And sometimes it is so hard for us to sort out our own thinking. Be glad - He knows it all and he is only a prayer away to help.

Now, all this sounds absurdly strange for people who have not met with Jesus Christ as the forgiver of their sins. Many people do not like the idea of God knowing all we think and feel. There is so much wrong going on in those dark corners of our minds and hearts; we do not like other people to know them; we do not like God to know them.

We are able to hide our mind and our heart to other people, to a certain extent. But there is no escaping from God...

Like it or not, these are the facts... God is omniscient. He knows all things. And whether we escape to Greenland, to China, or whether we bury ourselves in the deepest coal mines of the world... he is still intimately close and knows every fibre of our body and of our mind.

He knows our heart and mind... he knows our sins, the areas of our life where we rebel against him - because that is what sin is, ultimately. Not doing what God tells us to do, and doing what he tells us not to do.

God sees it all. Jesus sees it all. His mind penetrates straight into yours.

3 Forgiveness of sins

Jesus saw that the four men and their lame friend had faith. And when this paralyzed man was lowered on the floor in front of Jesus, he saw immediately: this man needs forgiveness of sins. Much more than that he needs physical healing.

Jesus only spoke a few words. ‘Son, forgiven are your sins.’ That is the sequence of the words in the original Greek, placing all stress on the forgiving love of God.

This is much more important than physical well-being.

Without physical healing, we can be closely connected with God and with other people.

Without forgiveness, we live far away from God, now and in eternity.

Forgiveness is important, because sin is serious. It creates an impenetrable everlasting barrier between God and us.

Jesus never took sin lightly. He never told people: “Do you have a sense of guilt, forget about it, I am okay you are okay.” On the contrary, he considered sin as inexcusable departure from God’s holy law, as having a soul choking effect.

The advice, “get rid of your guilt feelings, do not exaggerate, you are okay, a little badness, a little wrong, a little hatred is not so bad”, is destructive.

It is like the doctor saying to the person with cancer: ‘Ah don’t worry, we all get sick every now and then.’ Or as if Jesus said to the paralyzed man: ‘Just ignore it, just accept it. You are okay. We all have our little problems in life...’

Just as we must not ignore our physical diseases, so we must not ignore our moral disease.

Jesus knows how to deal with physical ailments of the worst sort, as He is God.

He is able to look straight into our mind and heart, as He is God.

He also knows how to deal with the darkness He finds in our lives, because he is God.

The scribes were correct in their assessment that by offering forgiveness, Jesus made himself equal to God. Only the one against whom sin is committed, God, can forgive those sins. And do not for a moment think that the injustice we do to other people, does not involve God.

Pope Benedict XVI writes about this in one of his biographies about Jesus:

“Every instance of trespass among men involves some kind of injury to truth and love and is thus opposed to God, who is truth and love.”

So yes, ultimately, we need forgiveness from God for all wrong we do to each other. And even if those people forgive us, God also has to forgive. And the scribes were right: only God can forgive sins.

The same scribes were wrong in their assessment that Jesus' words meant blasphemy. They should have understood that the only other alternative was the truth: He is God indeed.

Jesus came from heaven, God became flesh. He came to proclaim forgiveness of sins, yes, not just proclaim forgiveness, he actually provided forgiveness.

He did this on the basis of his own sacrifice for all sins. The Apostle Mark quotes Jesus as saying that He had come “to give his life as a ransom for many.” (Mark 10:45)

Jesus does not only convey to this paralytic that his sins are forgiven, but he also *in his own right* cancels the paralytic's debt to God. He blots out his sins forever and ever and Jesus does this by himself.

Conclusion

Jesus shows that he is God himself, and all of that is for our own benefit. He knows us inside out, he heals, and he forgives. Most important, He forgives...

Let us then not deny what he already knows, and confess our sins to him...

Let us come to him with our sick souls, and receive his perfect forgiveness, once and for all.

Knowing that you are forgiven is the strongest healing force in life. It sets us right with God. It liberates us to live with each other. It liberates us to live with ourself.

And it is so easy. Jesus gives it freely to those who ask. We are only a prayer away from the greatest gift on earth.