

A Story with Many Surprising Turns

Sermon for the 19th Sunday after Trinity

Sermon Text: Mark 2:1-12



And when He returned to Capernaum after some days, it was reported that He was at home. ²And many were gathered together, so that there was no more room, not even at the door. And He was preaching the word to them. ³And they came, bringing to Him a paralytic carried by four men. ⁴And when they could not get near Him because of the crowd, they removed the roof above Him, and when they had made an opening, they let down the bed on which the paralytic lay. ⁵And when Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven." ⁶Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts, ⁷"Why does this man speak like that? He is blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?" ⁸And immediately Jesus, perceiving in His Spirit that they thus questioned within themselves, said to them, "Why do you question these things in your hearts? ⁹Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise, take up your bed and walk' ¹⁰But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins" – He said to the paralytic – ¹¹"I say to you, rise, pick up your bed, and go home." ¹²And he rose and immediately picked up his bed and went out before them all, so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, "We never saw anything like this!"

What were these people thinking when they climbed onto a stranger's roof! And what were they thinking when they completely demolished the person's roof? That goes against normal human sense. What would you say if someone simply made a hole in your roof and let down a sick person into the living room in front of everyone. The Evangelist Mark describes the situation when these people climbed onto a roof to let down their sick friend at Jesus' feet so vividly and concretely. Let's imagine this situation a little more specifically: I imagine how a great crowd of people sit spellbound before Jesus. Jesus could speak well, and people would absorb every single word He said. And not only were Jesus' Words good, but they were also accompanied by mighty deeds. So, the crowd was spellbound at Jesus' feet when He would perform the next miracle. But the surprise didn't come from Jesus this time, but from this other group that climbed onto the roof. I imagine how dirt and wood and grass fell from the roof. I imagine how a dog would then start to bark and a couple of people had to clear a spot in the center of the room for this poor person who was probably at death's door. And what were the people on the roof thinking? What did they want to accomplish? Did they have absolutely no shame and no respect for others? And was this action legally protected at all? Against accidents and other terrible things, I mean. What they were thinking isn't revealed to us. But it is already clear what they thought. They wanted their friend to be helped. They needed healing from this misery, and they knew that Jesus could help. They not only knew this, but they also believed in Jesus! And Jesus saw this faith! And when Jesus saw this faith, the second big surprise of the day happened. Jesus spoke the greatest Word that could ever be spoken – A Word that otherwise only God is allowed to say: "Your sins are forgiven!" What a Word! What a promise! And what a surprise! Not just healing of the body but healing of the soul! With this Word from Jesus, everything became clear all at once. What it all was about became clear. It also became clear what Jesus' speech would be about in the first place. The point is that all people have to stand before God at some point. And how can we do that when we are stained with sin? What can we use to disguise ourselves so that the multitude of our sins and our dirty thoughts do not become visible before God's holiness? We must all admit one thing – as we are now, we can't stand before God because we are sinful and God is holy. And that's why, before anything else we need only this: forgiveness! Because without forgiveness, we remain cut off from God. Without forgiveness, we remain stuck in our sins and must die. And every other thought must come second. What a surprise: a sick person wanted healing of the body but instead, received healing of the soul!

And what were the others thinking. I mean those who were standing around. I would have expected a greater outcry. What are you doing! Why are you breaking the roof? Or why are you disturbing the gathering? Or who should now pay for the broken roof? No, they don't ask any of these questions. But what they thought is revealed to us by Jesus Himself, they thought: "That is blasphemy! People can't forgive sins! Only God can do that!" On the one hand, what they thought was completely correct because it's true that people can't forgive sins! The people at that time knew this. And yet, they didn't know that Jesus is God among us and therefore can forgive sins. And that's why they wanted to deny Jesus. They wanted to say that Jesus had no right to forgive. They would accept everything else from Jesus – they would accept Him healing sick people, they would accept Him as a good role model or even His pious Words. But they wouldn't acknowledge that Jesus is God among us and that He can forgive sins. That's why these people didn't complain that the roof was destroyed or that the gathering was disturbed. They only complained that Jesus forgave sins. They wanted to prevent the sick person from really being healthy in body and soul. Even this thought is not completely foreign to us. We know many people who accept and even appreciate Jesus. But one thing they don't expect from Jesus: forgiveness of sins! Such people either think that forgiveness of sins is totally unnecessary because they can get by very well on their own or they think that forgiveness of sins must first be paid for by their own good deeds. That is a catastrophe. If we think that we can deal with our own sins through our own skill or ability, we are just like those people at the gathering who stood at Jesus' feet. They were so close to Jesus and yet so far from Him. We also stand like this before Jesus. We have His Words. We can go to church or lay our sins at His feet at any time... but we don't do that. And what was Jesus thinking during all of this? What's amazing is that, in this short passage, we realize that Jesus' thoughts, words, and actions know absolutely no bounds. Jesus purifies all people's thoughts and actions. He can discern both the faith of the people on the roof as well as the unbelief of those who are in safety on the ground. Jesus crosses out everything and speaks His Word about it: "Why do you question these things in your hearts?" So He reveals everything that is going on in people's hearts. But Jesus is more than just His thoughts. He speaks His Word, and His Word is not just loose talk but immediately translates into action. With a mighty Word that doesn't just forgive sins but also includes healing, He says to the paralytic: "rise, pick up your bed, and go home." And the paralytic immediately stands up and walks. When we talk about Jesus, we notice right away that it's about more than just what He thought or did. It's all about who Jesus is. And when we know who Jesus is, we know what He can do. In this passage, we see that Jesus does everything that actually only God can do. Jesus understands all thoughts. Jesus forgives all sins. And finally, Jesus also even heals the paralyzed man. So Jesus takes away the consequences of sin – sickness and ultimately death. Everything that Jesus did are things that only God can do. In Jesus, we see the incarnate God before us. And in Jesus, we see God's loving hands stretched out to us, wanting to heal us body and soul. In Jesus, God also purifies all our thoughts and forgives us. Now, I'm imagining the events again in a very practical way. A man at death's door stands up. And not only does he stand up... he also lifts a heavy bed onto his shoulder and walks out the front door. Accompanied by a loud barking dog, he walked down the street. And all the people move to the windows and doors to watch the spectacle – a person they recently thought was deathly ill, a person everyone thought was a lost cause, walks down the street. Yes, that's exactly how it is when we meet Jesus. Yes, you all heard it correctly. What Jesus did then, He can still do. Everything that upsets you and makes you sick, you can leave behind you. And you can be pleased as punch to leave everything heavy behind you, take your bed, and go! And you don't need to destroy your neighbor's roof at all for this. Jesus can encompass all that you are and all that you have with His thoughts even now. And He has nothing but good things in mind for you. You can simply let the complaints be complaints and go. Take your bed and go! Everything comes down to this Word of Jesus. A Word that crosses all borders. A Word that cleanses heart and mind. A Word which triumphs over sin, death, and the devil. So, pick up your bed and go! Amen.