

February 1, 2006
Healing Service
Sermon by Rev Timothy A Leitzke

A Reading from Mark

And going again into Capernaum after some days it was heard that he was in a house, and many were gathered together so that the house was no longer able to hold them, not even pressed up against the door, and he was speaking the word to them.

And they come, bringing to him a paralytic carried by four (people). And, after not being able to bring him to him on account of the crowd, they unroofed the roof that was above him, and after digging it out they lowered the stretcher where the paralytic was lying.

And Jesus, beholding their faith, says to the paralytic, “Child, your sins are sent away.”

But some of the scribes were sitting there and talking it through in their hearts, “Why does this man speak in this manner? He blasphemes! Who is able to send away sins but God alone?”

And straightaway, after perceiving by his spirit that they talked it through in this manner in themselves, Jesus says to them, “Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are sent away’, or to say, ‘Rise, and take up your stretcher and go’? And in order that you might have knowledge that the Son of Humanity has authority upon the earth to send away sins”—he said to the paralytic—“I say to you, rise, take up your stretcher and go into your house!”

And he was raised and straightaway after taking up the stretcher he went out before all, so that all were beside themselves and glorified God saying, “We never saw something of this manner!”

The Word of the Lord

The world was crawling with healers. There were reputable doctors, there were people with herbal cures that worked or were at least helpful. Then, there were the traveling medicine men, the faith healers. This Jesus fellow was one of them. He had the hottest cure around. People were flocking to him, crushing him with requests that he do great things for them. They even tore open the roof of the house he was in to get a paralytic to him. Today, in theory at least, we do not seek out the traveling medicine men...in theory. So we have on our hands a Jesus Crisis, if you will. We feel pressured to choose between the Jesus who intercedes for us and gives us forgiveness and the Jesus who miraculously heals us from grave illness.

Do any of you ever think that it's silly to pray for physical healing, and then when you're sick you cry, "O God, please, deliver me from this" and then, when you get better, you feel really, really weird for having asked God to fix the illness? Or, do you ever wonder about why in the Bible Jesus can heal all sorts of people, and other miracle workers abound, and yet God does not seem to be dishing out miraculous healings in your life? The two Jesuses are warring. St Mark takes equal parts of each Jesus, sprinkles in some characters necessary to advance the plot, stirs, and voila: today's gospel reading. Remember, in Mark's gospel Jesus knows no bounds. At his baptism he stands with his feet in the chaotic waters of the Jordan and the heavens are torn open above him. God is at work in Jesus, and

because God is at work in Jesus anything is possible. He is not going to fit into any nice category.

The first thing that Jesus does is he sees the faith of those who brought the paralytic. Jesus sees faith. It does not matter how much. There is no critical mass for faith, no minimum level for it to be effective. God just gives it to us, and God, at work in Jesus, sees that faith. Jesus talks to the paralytic through the paralytic's faith. The faith that God already planted there receives Jesus' words: "Child, your sins are sent away." I love that image. Your sins are sent away. They are gone. They are not attached to you any more.

It is so with each of us. God has planted faith in each of us, that ability to trust, that ability to listen to God, that ability to speak to God and have God listen. Faith is our lifeline to God. When we are troubled, when we are stressed, when we are sick, when we are tired, when our bodies or relationships need healing God touches us through that lifeline of faith, and our faith receives God's words: "Child, your sins are sent away." Your shortcomings are sent away. Your limits are gone. The bad things you have done are not attached to you any more. Your sickness hurts you now, but you are always mine and I will always be true to you and on the last day I will raise you up imperishable.

The second thing Jesus does is physically heal the paralytic. He restores the person to health. Jesus delivers on what was advertised. The traveling medicine man is the real deal, but notice that within our story the physical healing comes *after* forgiveness. Jesus sends away the paralytic's sins, and *then* he heals his

paralysis. In the same manner God is at work in healing us, working through human agents—doctors, nurses, therapists, caregivers—to bring real physical healing, but first and foremost God is sending away our sins. God is sending away our brokenness and raising us up imperishable every day.

Furthermore, forgiveness is physically beneficial to us. How often are we haunted by our sins? How often are our relationships damaged by our wrongdoing and we just can't face one another? How often do we feel stress and frustration over our limits? These things are physically harmful to us. Our minds affect our bodies and our bodies affect our minds. The agony of Sin makes us sick. How great and joyful then is our forgiveness! For being forgiven, having these sins sent away, restores us not just to spiritual health, but physical health as well.

Mark has stirred our warring Jesuses together, and we see that this Jesus Crisis is a false dilemma. God is most certainly at work in healing our lives through human agents, and yes sometimes acts in ways that are utterly mysterious and beyond our comprehension. First and foremost, God is at work forgiving our sins, sending our sins away, banishing our brokenness and raising us up as God's people. Jesus is not some traveling medicine man; he is, in our faith story, the total package. In Jesus the Christ we touch and taste and hear and see God at work healing and forgiving us in the same act. In Jesus the Christ we see God poured out to send our Sin away forever. In Jesus the Christ we hear those words that never grow old: "Child, your sins are sent away." Amen