

Sermon Transcript for October 10, 2021

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

So Jesus is traveling to His own city. So the Sea of Galilee, He's on one side. He takes the boat and He goes to the other side, and He comes to His own city. Now when we think of the city of Jesus, maybe Bethlehem comes to mind, where He was born. That seems to be the city of Jesus, but He didn't spend more than at most a couple of months there when He was a child before they fled into Egypt or went up to Nazareth, so He wasn't there in Bethlehem that long. Or we might think that the city of Jesus is Nazareth, which is where He was raised. But no, this is Caesarea. This is a Roman town that was completely secular, but Jesus had claimed and adopted this as His own. This is where a vast majority of His ministry takes place, in this foreign-named town where there's a mixture of Jews and Gentiles and Samaritans and all sorts of people. He has come to His town, and people who were living there came to Him, and they had faith to bring this paralytic.

Now it was not easy being the friend of a paralytic in this day. You had to take a lot of time and energy out of your day to provide for and help this man, so there was a lot of dedication involved with these men who brought the paralytic to Jesus. There was no handicapped-accessible places anywhere, and so it was very challenging. And so Jesus sees them and sees their faith. Now is this His divine act of the God within seeing these men and seeing their faith? Maybe, but I think really what I'd like to emphasize more is His incarnation, His fleshiness, His being with us.

When we talk about the incarnation of Jesus, we talk about carne. If you know Spanish, it's flesh, meat, so when we talk about the incarnation, we talk about the God of the universe becoming human flesh, just like us. I think this is important to remember that we do not have a God who is far off and does not understand us. We have a God who is close to us, who promises to be with us and provide for us and love us.

Last week, we talked about the Christ, the Messiah, the anointed one, the one who came to dwell with us for the specific purpose, the reason that He was anointed was, to forgive our sins and to give us the assurance of everlasting life. Here we have Him coming down in flesh and dwelling amongst the people, so much so that He can look at these men, and you can imagine, you can see somebody who just really trusts you. When you look at your own child, and they just trust you to solve all the problems of the world. At least until they're about six, and then they realize you have no clue what's going on. But early on, they look at you with absolute trust. They know you know, and they have complete faith that you're going to figure it out.

Well, this is what Jesus saw in these men. They had heard His ministry. They had seen Him. This was His hometown. This is where He had adopted Himself into this city, so they had faith that He could do whatever He wanted to do, and you could see it in their faces. I think it's more that Jesus recognized because He was flesh, human, He could see the human desire and faith in these men.

And even in the Old Testament, we have a God who is near, who is with us. This is Jacob fleeing from Laban and heading back to his home territory, not knowing where he is going or what he's doing, and yet God is still with him. Now there's a tradition that this place where he lays his head is where the temple is built back in the day, that this is the gateway of God, the house of God. Now what do you do in a house? You dwell there, so even in the Old Testament, we have this sense of God dwelling with His people and being with His people. In fact, He promises to Jacob that He will never leave Jacob, and He will do what He has promised to Jacob.

Now what has God promised to Jacob? That He will give him the land, that his descendants will be as numerous as the dust on the earth, and that all the families of the world will be blessed through his offspring.

Now this was not unique or new. God had promised this to Abraham multiple times. He'd promised it to Isaac multiple times. And He promises it to Jacob multiple times, partially because He understands human frailty.

When things get rough, when we get scared or frustrated or angry as the Epistle lesson states, when we fail to trust in God, either we feel sanctimonious because things aren't going our way and we get self-righteous and we get angry, or whether we're afraid or fearful because we don't know what's going to happen. Either way, we give room for the Devil to dwell with us.

See God dwells with us, but when we worry, when we doubt, when we turn our eyes away from God, when we get angry unjustifiably, when we think we need to make things right by our own efforts, we cease to dwell with God. We walk away from God, and we allow the Devil to come and dwell with us. So God encourages us to put off our anger and to love one another and to trust His Word to be renewed in your spirit. We're going to get into that. As Ephesians says, put off your old self and your old manner of life because that's dwelling with Satan. That's not dwelling with God. He wants you to dwell with Him. He has come to dwell with you, now He wants you to be there and to know what He's got for you.

So even in the Old Testament, God dwells with His people and reassures Jacob over and over again that He is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and He is our God as well. He is the God of the living not of the dead, so He is present with us. So this living God now becomes flesh literally and dwells with us, and we have a paralytic who flesh has rebelled against him because of sin and chaos and corruption in this world. Not because of his individual sin, but because of generic sin that has corrupted this whole earth that we live in. He's paralyzed, and the men have faith and they trust Jesus. And what does He say? "Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven."

Now you can imagine everybody's thoughts at this moment. You're a paralytic. You really want to get up and walk. You know that Jesus is a miracle worker. Your friends have brought you there. They know that He's a miracle worker. There you are before Him, and what does He say? "Take heart; your sins are forgiven." You can imagine the four men and the paralytic going, "Well, that's all fine and good, but I'd really like to walk." So you can kind of feel the disappointment with them, and then you hear the Sadducees on the other hand, who are accusing Him of blasphemy, "How dare He forgive sins? Only God can do that, and that comes from heaven. That's not here, that's from God and it's at the temple."

It says that Jesus knows their thoughts. Now again, you don't have to be God to recognize the thoughts of somebody who's angry at you and thinks you have gone against God. You can see it in their faces. So again, I think this is God seeing the human reactions and reacting to that. Yes, was He helped by His divine nature? Probably, but He didn't need to be. His fleshiness, His earthiness let Him see what was going on.

And He says to these doubters, to the ones who are accusing Him, who are angry at Him, He says, "What's easier to say, your sins are forgiven or get up and walk?" Now, which one is easier to say? Well, forgive your sins because I can say forgive your sins and there's no way empirically or physically that you can tell whether it worked or not, so it's easy for me to say it. If I say get up and walk to a man who's paralyzed, well either he gets up and I'm true to my word, or I'm delusional and nothing happens. It's pretty straightforward, cut and dry.

So in some ways, it's easier to say, "Your sins are forgiven," but it's much easier to do the forgiveness of sins, and really it's much more difficult to say, "Your sins are forgiven," and be truthful about it because how are our sins forgiven? How does this man, Jesus, have the authority to forgive the sins of this man? And is it more important than getting up and walk?

So Jesus turns to the guy, and He says, "Okay, just so everybody here knows that I have the authority to forgive sins, get up and walk and go home." And he does, but as excited as that man was that he was able to stand again, he got a greater gift in the forgiveness of sins because I guarantee you that that paralyzed man is now dead in the grave. Not only can he no longer walk, he can no longer breathe. He's dead. And yet, because of the promise, the original statement, "Your sins are forgiven," even though his body is dead, he is alive in Christ for all eternity, and he will walk again when Christ comes.

So which is better, your sins forgiven or rise up and walk? The miracle of walking is temporary. It ends for all of us eventually, but the forgiveness of sins, that is eternal. And not only that, that brings then a restoration of the body, so you get both in the first one, the forgiveness of sins. So yes, is it easier to say, "Your sins are forgiven"? True. But to mean it and to have it actually work, that was hard because that was only accomplished through Jesus Christ becoming flesh, dwelling amongst us, and dying on the cross to give us that hope. The reason that we can say today, "Your sins are forgiven," that I can stand before you and say in His stead and by His command, "Your sins are forgiven," the reason I can say that and the reason that you can believe that to be true is because Jesus became flesh and dwelt with us. He's near to us, and He does not leave us. So much so, that He gives us His voice in the pastor who is able to declare to you, "Your sins are forgiven." Not only that, He gives us His own body and blood, His own flesh and blood in the Lord's Supper. He is still incarnational. He is still enfleshing with us. He is still dwelling amongst us.

And that is why we can rejoice that the authority of the forgiveness of sins has been given to mankind, because Christ became man and gives that to all of us. And so we are to take this new flesh, this new embodiment that we have become, the old Adam being drowned in our baptism and a new Adam, a new Christ, dwelling within us with the spirit of God. We are now a new creation, a new flesh, a new body and soul. And with that new body, we are called to put away the former things, to put away the lying and the cheating and the stealing and getting angry without cause. We're called to speak the truth, which is challenging in today's world it seems. We're also called to be angry, but not sin. I'm pretty sure that most of the time when I'm angry, I'm actually sinning. There are very few times where my anger is probably righteous, appropriate anger. Most of the time I suspect I get angry for the wrong reasons, and I suspect it's probably the same for you.

So again, this new flesh that we have been given because of Christ's flesh, we are called to trust Him, and if we trust Him, we don't need to be angry because we trust the God will work it out, that God will guide our ways, that God will punish evil in His own time, and that He will give us life and salvation. So we don't need to be angry at the injustices because we know they will be dealt with by God. We also don't need to be worried and afraid because our new flesh is with Christ, and we can trust Him because He is faithful and He is with us.

As He even promised Jacob, "I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you," the same is true for you today. God will not leave you until He has done what He has promised you. And what has He promised you? That you die, yet shall you live, that today you will be with me in paradise, that we will dwell in the house of the Lord forever, that every tear in our eye will be wiped clean, that all of our ailments and frailties and sin and heartache and sorrow and pain will be gone, and that we will live with Him with everlasting righteousness and blessedness and innocence. So God will not leave you until that has been accomplished, which means, "I will be with you always to the very end of the age and no one and nothing can snatch you out of my hand."

May that grace and that mercy and that peace, which is with you now and always, be and abide with you unto life everlasting. Amen.