



LIVING WORD EPISCOPAL CHURCH

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A Sermon for the Nineteenth Sunday after Trinity St. Matthew 9:1-8 Fr. William Klock

October 26, 2025

In our Gospel St. Matthew writes that “Jesus got into the boat and crossed back over to his own town.” Back to Capernaum. From the far side of the Sea of Galilee. From that place where he’d been confronted by a man filled with demons and cast those demons into a herd of pigs. You know the story. The demon-possessed pigs promptly stampeded into the sea and drowned themselves. And that left the pig farmer and the local townspeople none too pleased with Jesus. They pleaded with him to leave. So he and the disciples got back into their boat and sailed across the Sea of Galilee. And now he’s back home in Capernaum. Matthew’s version of this story is the shortest on details. Mark’s version implies that Jesus was tired. He went home to get a break from the crowds and it took a few days before anyone realised that he was home. But when they figured it out, the crowds were back. Before he knew it, they’d let themselves into his house and he was preaching. It was mostly just ordinary people, but there were some scribes and Pharisees there in that packed and crowded room. They had to keep an eye—or an ear—on Jesus.

And that crowd posed a problem to four friends. They had a fifth friend who was paralysed. When they heard Jesus was back in town, these four men went and got their friend and carried him, cot and all, to Jesus’ house. Jesus was healing everybody else. Surely he would heal their friend. *If* they could get to him. And they couldn’t. I can imagine them trying. Asking politely if people

might get out of the way. Looking to see if maybe they could squeeze through a back door or a window, then going back and trying to push some people aside to get to the front door—all to no avail. There was no way they’d ever get their friend into that house. And that’s when they had an idea. The roof! In those days, in that place, roofs were flat—they served as extra living space when it was hot and you needed to get out into a cooling breeze—but more importantly, roofs were made of rush and palms plastered between beams. So these men take their friend to the roof and they start jabbing at the roof with sticks and kicking at it with their heels and pulling it apart with their hands, until they’d made a hole big enough to lower their friend down to Jesus.

Now imagine Jesus, in the house, preaching to the crowd while that was going on upstairs. Loud scratching and thumping. And pretty soon bits of plaster and rush start falling. Before too long there’s a hole in the roof and everyone sees these guys looking down—probably a little sheepishly. I wonder what went through Jesus’ mind. He was tired. His rest had been cut short. The crowd was one thing, but he really didn’t need some yahoos tearing up his roof. “Great! There goes the damage deposit,” he’s thinking to himself. But pretty quickly, as they lowered their friend to him, he saw what was going on. And I think Jesus smiled.

Why? Because Matthew writes that Jesus saw their faith and if Jesus was anything like me and most of the other pastors I know, the exhaustion, the frustration of not having a break, the annoyance at having these guys destroy his roof, I think it all would have melted away, because seeing the faith of these men made it all worth it. And looking down at the paralyzed man, Jesus says to him, “Have courage!” Take heart! In other words, “Don’t be afraid.” Because I imagine some people might be afraid if their friends just tore a hole in the Messiah’s roof to get them inside.

Because even if Jesus was smiling, the people around him were looking shocked and outraged and angry. “How dare you dig a hole in the Messiah’s roof!” And so Jesus looks at him and says, “Your sins are forgiven!”

Now, that’s not what we might expect Jesus to say to this man. Judging by Jesus’ other encounters, we’d expect him to say something like, “Get up and walk; your faith has made you well.” But instead, he tells the paralysed man that his sins are forgiven. That’s nice, but he’s still lying there paralysed on his cot. So why would Jesus say, “Your sins are forgiven”? Brothers and Sisters, Jesus found a teaching moment in everything. He’d healed people more times than anyone could count at that point, and that was a sign that the Messiah had come and that God’s kingdom was breaking into the world. But what did that really mean? Well, remember that everyone had their own ideas about the Messiah and about the kingdom—and, most important, how they could have a share in it. The people needed more than just to see miracles. They needed to know more than that the Messiah had come; they desperately needed to know what the Messiah had come to *do*. Jesus saw that group of scribes there in his house that day and saw a perfect opportunity. Maybe they were legitimately curious to hear what Jesus had to say or maybe they were there just to criticise or report back to the priests or the Pharisees, but, right on cue, they hear Jesus’ words—“Your sins are forgiven”—and he can see their outrage. He could see how they scowled as they grumbled to each other about how blasphemous this was. “Who can forgive sins except God?” they howled in Mark’s telling of the story.

Just as Jesus could see the faith of the paralysed man’s friends as they lowered him through the hole in his roof, he could see the opposite in the grumbling scribes. And so he asks them, “Why are your hearts so intent

on evil?” Of course, that just made them angrier. “We’re not the evil ones!” they say back. “You are...you...you...you *blasphemer!*” But Jesus goes on with the teaching moment and says to them, “Which is easier to say, “Your sins are forgiven,” or to say, “Get up and walk?” But so that you may know that the son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins”—and now he turns back to the paralysed man—“Get up, take up your cot, and go home.”

And the paralysed man got up, took up his cot, and went home. I think there was probably a little more to it than that. He probably stretched a bit and moved his arms and legs around and maybe jumped up and down a few times. I think he probably laughed and yelled and gave a hug and many thanks to Jesus, but Matthew doesn’t get bogged down in those sorts of details, because his point is—as usual—that when Jesus healed the man, he was healed. There was no struggle or delay. This was the same word God spoke in the beginning when he said, “Let there be light!” and there was light. When Jesus told the man to get up, to take his cot, and to go home, that’s exactly what the man did. In Jesus, God’s new creation had come. And if that’s all that had happened, the scribes would have had nothing to complain about.

What really stuck in their craw was Jesus declaring the man’s sins forgiven. *That* made them mad. Even for the Messiah, as far as they were concerned, that was too big a claim. To heal the paralysed man? That was good. But if he had sins to forgive, his friends should have taken him to the temple in Jerusalem for that. The priests there were the only ones with the authority to offer sacrifices for sin and to declare someone reconciled to God. But the crowd understood and Matthew makes a point of saying that the crowd was afraid—afraid in the sense that they were awestruck by what had happened and knew that somehow and in some way the God of

Israel was at work in and through Jesus—as if they’d just witnesses one of those great and awe-inspiring events from the Old Testament that no one in Israel had seen in a thousand years. Matthew says they saw what had happened and that they praised God for giving such authority to men.

The story is sort of the whole gospel story in a nutshell. Jesus teaches and he heals—he does the things the Messiah was supposed to be doing. He even foreshadows the resurrection when he tells the man to “get up”—or better to “*Rise up!*” That’s resurrection language. This is what Jesus promises for everyone who trusts in him: He forgives our sins, he raises us to new life, and he invites us home—to live as his new creation in the presence of God. But as far as the scribes and Pharisees were concerned, Jesus did all this the wrong way and that made it blasphemy.

But Jesus wasn’t worried about that. You know when you’re accused of something bad by someone and you just want to say, “Man, look in the mirror!” Or that old thing your parents used to tell you when someone insulted you, “Consider the source.” Or that line from a certain cartoon character, “Your boos mean nothing to me; I’ve seen what makes you cheer.” Jesus flips around the accusation. He exposes the wickedness in the hearts of those scribes and he does it for everyone to see. He discredits them and their accusations. He leaves them fuming. You can imagine their red faces and how their mouths are moving, but they can’t say anything. And Jesus is left standing there full of authority and life and power.

I wonder if this teachable moment popped into Jesus’ head as the plaster rained down on him and the man was lowered through the hole. The paralytic probably had an apologetic look on his face—like, “I’m really sorry, Jesus, for the hole in your roof. Please forgive me and my friends.” And Jesus realised that this was the

perfect moment to say something about forgiveness—because this man and his friends and, in fact, all of Israel, that’s what they really needed: forgiveness, not for making a hole in his roof, but for far more serious sins—for idolatry and for greed and for faithlessness and for all the ways they’d failed to live out their covenant with the Lord. Israel needed a lot of things—just like the paralysed man did—but most of all she needed forgiveness. In that, the paralysed man represents Israel and all her wrong expectations of the Messiah. The Jews wanted the Messiah to solve all their problems. For some that was healing sickness, for others it was casting out demons, for some it was getting everybody to keep the law better, and for others it was bashing Roman heads and destroying the pagan gentiles. But not very many people understood that none of these things was the real problem. The real problem was sin. Sin is why the world is in the mess it’s in. Sin was why Israel was estranged from God. The people had been unfaithful to the Lord. He’d called them to be light in the darkness, but they’d hid their light under a basket. More than anything else, they needed forgiveness, because forgiveness is the start; it’s what paves the way for everything else to be set to rights. Forgiveness is the way to new creation.

I think that’s the part of the story that gets most of our attention. But notice that what Matthew puts at the heart of this story isn’t the healing or the announcement of forgiveness. The heart of the story is Jesus statement that the son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins and then the response of the people. We miss this because we’re not thinking like First Century Jews. When Jesus calls himself the “son of man”, he’s drawing on an image from Daniel 7. The book of Daniel is about faithfulness in the midst of exile. Israel had been defeated and the people taken off to Babylon. Worse, some like Daniel, were pressured to

compromise, to bow to a pagan king and to pagan gods—to give up on the God of Israel and to give up on his promises. And some did just that. But Daniel stood firm and the Lord gave him a vision of those pagan kings cast down, of the God of Israel taking his throne, and the son of man “coming with the clouds of heaven...to be given dominion and glory and kingship, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him” (Daniel 7:13-14). And yet, when Daniel asks what the vision means, he is told that this kingship and dominion “shall be given”—not to a single person, but “to the people, the holy ones of the Most High; their kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom and all dominions shall serve and obey them” (Daniel 7:27).

The son of man in Daniel’s vision was a symbol for the faithful remnant of God’s people—for those who stood firm in their faith in the God of Israel, who remembered his covenant, and who refused to bow to pagan gods and kings. So when Jesus referred to himself as the son of man, this is what the scribes (and everyone else) would have been thinking of. And this is why Matthew says at the end that the people praised God that this authority has been given not to *a* man—Jesus—but to *men*, plural. Because up to this point, Daniel’s vision had yet to be fulfilled. The Maccabees, for example, had claimed to be that faithful remnant, but their kingdom didn’t last. The people who *were* that faithful remnant—people like Zechariah and Elizabeth and Mary and Joseph and Simeon and Anna, although they were probably too humble to actually claim being the faithful remnant—people like them knew all too well that the Lord had yet to grant them anything like authority and dominion. That’s what Mary’s song, the one we call the *Magnificat*, is all about. But here Jesus identifies himself with that vision. In him the son of man is finally being granted that authority and dominion—that kingship that everyone thought of in

connection with God’s kingdom and the world finally being set to rights—and Jesus isn’t just saying it or claiming it. He proves it when he tells the paralysed man to get up, take his bed, and go home. For the people there that day, this was bigger than just the Messiah. Jesus could claim to be the “son of man”, but the son of man wasn’t just one person, the son of man represented the whole faithful remnant in Israel. We need to grasp the enormous hope embodied in those words of Jesus about the son of man. It’s not just Jesus who will take his throne. He will. But that he will take his throne also means that all the faithful will be vindicated as their enemies are cast down, and that they will finally share in that God-given authority and dominion. So the people in crowded in Jesus’ house that day recognised that in Jesus the Messiah, God’s kingdom had finally come and that they would be part of it—not just as subject, but as kings and queens themselves. Or to borrow from C. S. Lewis, the day was coming when these sons of Adam and daughters of Eve would once again take their rightful place in creation set to rights.

This makes sense of another passage that often confuses people. Twice Jesus said to his disciples “whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven”. The first is in Matthew 16, after Jesus praises Peter for his confession, “You are the Messiah, the son of the living God”. Jesus says to him and the others, “I will give you the keys of heaven”. And in Matthew 18, in that passage about what we call “church discipline” and dealing with an unrepentant person, he repeats this statement about binding and loosing. This is all “son of man” stuff. Jesus isn’t giving special authority to Peter alone because he’s going to be the first pope. In fact, he’s not giving any special authority just to the apostles. No, this is a gospel authority given to all of the faithful remnant, to everyone who by faith identifies with the

Messiah. This is a people who are not only given dominion or kingship—to rule alongside the Messiah—but who also share in his role as prophet and priest. That’s what this binding and loosing language is about. As prophets, Jesus’ people were to speak out against the sins of Israel and to rebuke her faithlessness, and as priests they were called to mediate the saving, the forgiving message of the gospel to the nation—and eventually to the whole world.

This was good news and it explains why the crowds wouldn’t give Jesus a break. Israel’s scriptures were full of promises, but so many of them had yet to be fulfilled. Promises like Daniel’s vision of the son of man. Promises of forgiveness and of restoration and of dominion and authority. Time and again, things would happen and people would think, “Oh! This is it!” But it never quite happened. The remnant returned from their Babylonian exile, but things were never as they had been. The Maccabees defeated the Greeks and established Judah’s independence. And for a little while it looked like the Lord’s promises were on track to be fulfilled. And then it all fell apart. But the people knew that the Lord is faithful. Time and again he had shown his faithfulness in Israel’s past and they knew he would be faithful in their future. Every year they ate the Passover and remembered the Lord’s promises and looked forward in hopeful anticipation. And now, here was Jesus, and he was actually doing the things the Lord had promised and he was doing them like no one had before. They had faith. They would be forgiven, their enemies would be cast down, and the faithful remnant—who were now gathering around Jesus the Messiah—in them the people of God would be restored and made new and would be the people the Lord had promised—a people full of his life and a people for the life of the world—prophets, priests, and kings. The sons of Adam and the daughters of Eve would be forgiven their sins and would take

their thrones and all would once again be right with the world. This was good news!

And Brothers and Sisters, this is still good news for us—maybe even more than it was for the people crammed in Jesus house that day. In Jesus we see the faithfulness of God. They were still looking forward in anticipation, but we can look back and see the whole picture and how Jesus fulfilled the Lord's promises and that ought to strengthen our faith and ought to give us reason to look forward to our future in hope, knowing that what God has begun in Jesus he will surely finish. The world is often dark, we can feel small and alone, sometimes it feels like we're fighting a losing battle, but we can look back and see what the Lord has done and trust that he is faithful. He always has been and he always will be.

And this is good news because it tells us who we are. I think that too often we look at passages like this, where Jesus talks about himself as the son of man and we forget that it's not just telling us something about Jesus. The son of man represents a whole people. Because Jesus has fulfilled the role of the son of man, that means that we his people, through our union with him, we have been caught up in that son of man identity, too. Jesus has been given power and authority and dominion forever, and you and I share that with him. It's authority to live and to proclaim the good news that he has died, that he has risen, and that he has come again and that he brings forgiveness and life. And it's also the authority to speak as prophets to the world, to call out sin, to remind the world that the Lord will come in judgement to cleanse his creation, and to call men and women to repentance. And hand in hand with that role, we have the authority of priests. We're not only prophets, but priests, mediating the good news of Jesus and the life of God's spirit—mediating the redemption Jesus has made at the

cross—to a sick world, desperately in need of forgiveness and life.

Brothers and Sisters, think about that as you come to the Lord's Table this morning. The bread and the wine reminds us of the forgiveness and the life and the hope we find at the cross, but they should also remind us who we are in Jesus. We are Daniel's son-of-man people. We are prophets, priests, and kings and we have been made so for the life of the world. Seeing the faithfulness of God revealed in Jesus ought to move us—like the people that day in Jesus' house—to give God glory and there is no better way to glorify him than to be the people he has made us in Jesus and the Spirit, a people who live and proclaim his good news so that the world might see and know his faithfulness and give him glory.

Let's pray: O God, because without you we are not able to please you, mercifully grant that your Holy Spirit may in all things direct and rule our hearts, that in his power we might be the gospel people who have made, that we might be faithful in making known your faithfulness; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*