



# ST STEPHEN'S ANGLICAN CHURCH

11856 MAYS CHAPEL RD., TIMONIUM, MD 21093

**Sunday October 11, 2015 - Trinity 19**

*“For whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (then saith he to the sick of the palsy,) Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house.”*

**✠ In The Name of The Father and of The Son  
and of The Holy Ghost. Amen. ✠**

We humans beings, being occasionally rational creatures, are often will to believe something for which there is a reasonable explanation. I've never been inside an oven when bread rises, but I believe the explanation for how yeast works. I've not witnessed first-hand how a drop of water evaporates, condenses in clouds, and turns to rain ad infinitum, but I believe how the water cycle works.

But while we're willing to believe a number of reasonable things when they are accompanied by a reasonable explanation, we are never prepared to believe something as dogmatically as we are when were previously convinced it was inherently wrong, or were indoctrinated into another belief system. You'll never meet a more zealous Republican than somebody who used to be a Democrat, or a more zealous Democrat than somebody who was once a young Republican. Or in my case (and much more important than allegiance to a political party), a more dedicated Dodge owner than somebody who was raised in a family that viewed owning a General Motors car as being almost sacrosanct.

And that is why Jesus performed this miracle in this particular manner. The Scribes and Pharisees didn't just happen to be there, mind you; they didn't just coincidentally show up. They were there to see what sort of thing Jesus would do next, so they could challenge Him on it. At this point, they were looking for any excuse to condemn Jesus for crimes of heresy or blasphemy. It was just in the prior chapter of this same Gospel that Jesus healed the leper and sent him on his way. Likewise, it was fairly recent that Jesus had healed the invalid man by the pool in Jerusalem

called Bethesda, and was in the working of the same miracle accused of blasphemy for making Himself equal with God by saying “My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.” So, they didn't just happen by this speaking engagement of Jesus's, they came here explicitly looking for a dust-up; and people generally find what they're looking for, whether it's there or not.

So Jesus takes the most direct route first, and tells the young man “be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee.” A number of sins could result in palsy or paralysis, not the least of them indulgence of addiction, or extreme excess and debauchery of lifestyle. So the young man is probably carrying shame around with him, in addition to his physical limitations. So Jesus says “be of good cheer,” knowing that he will no longer have the shame **or** physical limitations. And **boom**, just like that, the Scribes and Pharisees rejoice a little in their hearts, because they have something else to charge Jesus with - a form of blasphemy, for presuming to forgive sins as only God can forgive them.

And this is where Jesus does something especially kind and gracious for them. As I said, you're never so inclined to believe something as purely or as dogmatically as when you were once categorically against it, so Jesus lets them assume He's just doing parlor tricks, or pronouncing absolution without proof. In doing so, He sets up the Scribes and Pharisees to think him a blasphemer, and firmly entrench themselves in it. And yet right away, He offers them the chance to be proven wrong, and to accept that He is who He claims to be. He says “well,

which one is easier to say - thy sins be forgiven thee,' or 'arise, go thy way?'" The answer of course is the former - you can go around pronouncing the absolution of sins all day in the name of God or any gods you chose - there's no proof required; as such, nobody can prove or disprove the effectiveness. Mix in a little "cult of personality," and it's easy to sell people that you're going around performing miracles, when all you're really doing is selling snake oil.

So after pointing that out, Jesus does what only Jesus can do - the impossible thing whose effectiveness can actually be proven or disproven; He says "*But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins.... Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house.*" And the young man does indeed get up and go.

In doing so, Jesus is inviting the "religious people" of His time to come to faith, and to meet their God face to face. Even his wording echos that - "the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins" speaks both to Himself in his humble human form, and to His divine heavenly origin. "Power on earth" points out that while He is one with God in the celestial realm, He hasn't lost divine power or divine authority here in this world. Not only that, but in doing this, He establishes the precedent of man (that is, the church) being able to forgive sin.

The good news for them is that unlike other encounters in the New Testament, it doesn't end with them picking up rocks to stone Him, or rattling their sabres and calling for His death. For all we know, a self-righteous Scribe or Pharisee might have actually seen Jesus as The Christ, and accepted Him as Lord and Savior.

And of all the narratives and parables we've read in the New Testament, I actually can't think of a better one than this, for a group of doubters and naysayers to be turned into a group of believers for once. The reason for that is that this is the most striking example of the faith of a group of people provide the opening for Jesus to come in and heal both the body and the soul of another. In this case, the man to be healed is present, but we don't hear him speak. There is no accounting provided by him or for him, nor is there any declaration of repentance; he doesn't call out "Jesus heal me," he just shows up. All we know is that Jesus, seeing **their** faith, spoke to the sick man and healed him.

It was this *vicarious faith* that provided the framework for this miracle to happen; the faith of a believing group, on the behalf of somebody else. The faith of the man's friends was enough to give Jesus a place to step in and enter the picture, a venue in which to perform this miracle. And this an important thing for us today, because the faith of groups still welcomes Jesus into the public eye to heal people, to heal families, and even to heal nations.

We believe and unashamedly confess Christ as Savior not just for ourselves, but for the world at large. This is one of the prime directives of the Church catholic. The world does not believe in anything but itself, as misplaced and erroneous as that faith certainly is. We call on Christ for our sake, but we call on Christ for a world that won't call on Him for its own sake.

When we have loved ones or friends or colleagues that don't believe, we need to see them with the love that group this young man's friends saw him. His sin brought about his troubles, yet he makes no personal confession about them. But his friends bring him to Jesus, because they know that Jesus will heal him. And ultimately, through their great faith, he is healed indeed. So don't forsake your friends and family and colleagues who are slow to call on Christ, and so long as they'll hear you in their life, be patient when His name comes up in conversation.

The friends of the young man lowered him down through a hole they'd made in a roof. Your prayers for those who need the healing of God in their life are like the ropes used by young man's friends to lower him down through the roof on his mat, to put him in front of Jesus for forgiveness and healing. Don't underestimate the power of this kind of "vicarious faith," it has brought more souls to Christ than we'll likely ever know. By all means, be verbal and forthright in your witness, but know that it will often fall on deaf ears. Prayers to God on the behalf of others, however, will never fall on deaf ears. And if we continue to lift those people up in prayer, or perhaps in this case, lower them down through the room in prayer, we have every hope that Jesus will say to them "be of good cheer, thy sins be forgiven thee."