

TRINITY 19

TEXT MATTHEW 9:1, EPHESIANS 4:17.

When Jesus had returned to his own town “Some men brought him a paralytic, lying on a mat. When Jesus saw their faith, he said “Take heart Son, your sins are forgiven.” This morning I bring you greetings from our Lord and Savior who by his grace heals us, first in our hearts and our souls. Amen

Our daily lives often divert us from the truth, beauty and peace that comes from knowing God. I don't fully understand sometimes how people can go through life without hope. Yet so many do because they do not know or understand the wonderful gift we have received from God. The wonderful gift of salvation, given us through our faith and by the grace of God, unearned in our unworthiness, promises us the most important thing we have to hold onto-that in our faith, no matter what happens to us in our lives, we will not be separated from God.

In this mornings Gospel, it's important to note a very important event. When the men in Jesus' home town bring this stricken man forward, Jesus recognizes something in them-their faith. Over and over again people flock to Jesus looking for healing or some miracle. Throughout the Gospel we see our Lord talk about how those who are witness to his actions fail to see the truth in his coming. After healing an official's Son, we see in the Gospel of John, Jesus' frustration with the people's demands on him. “Unless you people see miraculous signs and wonders, he told them, you will never believe.” (John 4:48).

But Jesus doesn't heal him immediately. Instead, he speaks directly to the young man and says to him “Take heart Son, your sins are forgiven.” Your sins are forgiven. Before he does anything else, he heals this man spiritually. He gives him hope-“Take heart!” he says, and imparts the hope of eternal life to this poor crippled man. He makes this man right with God, he removes the separation that existed which destroys all hope and healed his soul.

In that he also drives home an important point to those who are witnessing the event. They are ready to condemn him for forgiving sins. After all, only God can do that. And he challenges them, “why do you think evil in your hearts?” What is more important here? That this man walk or that his sins be forgiven and he be made right with God? Finally, not only does he heal the man and he gets up and walks, but he looks at those around him and makes a clear testament about why he is there. “That you may know that the Son of man has power on earth to forgive sins.” That is to make us right with God, to end that separation, to allow us to receive that beautiful gift of salvation through an unhindered faith.

Paul in his letter to the Ephesians in this mornings Epistle tries to provide us with guidance about abandoning sin. “Don't walk in the vanity of the mind...being separated from the life of God...due to the hardening of their hearts...giving your self over to (sin)...put off your old self, to be made new in the attitude of your minds.”

Being right with God, being healed spiritually, ending our separation from him by embracing what he has to offer us and abandoning earthly desire. That is the true hope that brings us peace in our hearts.

Every morning I enjoy reading the daily devotional “Our Daily Bread”. I hope each of you takes the time to do the same. Everyday there is a great pearl of wisdom based on scripture. It gives us pause to think and to understand God's message for us in Holy Scripture. We always have copies in the back and if you know of someone who needs the message of hope, give them a copy.

Recently, they spoke of Lord Kenneth Clark who was a well know producer and did the famous television series Civilization.” This world renowned man lived and died without ever knowing Christ. He spoke of an experience he had one time in his autobiography where he noted upon his visit to a beautiful church, “My whole being,” he stated, was irradiated by a kind of heavenly joy far more intense than anything I had known before.” He went on to say that it created a real problem for him because he would have to change. He stated “I was too deeply embedded in the world to change course.”

Here was God reaching out to him and he turned away. Imagine if the young man in this morning's Gospel felt the same way? "I don't need forgiveness, just make me walk again!" Yet as absurd as it may sound, we often do the same thing and it separates us from God. "God can you fix this? Heal this? Make it better?"

The peace of God, the hope He offers, the confidence to face any trial come first from our spiritual healing, not our physical. Our being right with God gives us the confidence to face any tribulation the world sets before us. Our willingness to forsake sin, to read and study his holy word, to let the Holy Spirit shine in us, to share his message with others. This is the spiritual healing that occurs in us when we let God in. "Do not marvel," says the Lord, "that I have said to you, you must be born again." (John 3:7).

There is nothing to fear when Christ is in our lives! Take everything from me, my home, my family, my money, my life-but do not let anything let me be separated from my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! All that goes on around me, all that fills my mind with confusion, pain, suffering, hate, discontent, let none of it cause the flame of the Holy Spirit that I want to shine in me grow so dim that it only flickers.

God does not turn from us-scripture tells us in many places that he is always faithful. That no matter how sinful we are, that we are loved by God and can always come back. If we are separated from God it is because we turn away from Him, not He from us. If we have no hope, it is because we do not allow the grace of God to fill our lives. If we do not open our eyes everyday and thank God for all that He gives us, then we just don't get it. No matter what malady besets us, it is our spiritual healing that must come first.

The evils of the world will always be there. Because we are human, they will often times flood our lives and cause us to drift away from our Lord. Yet every day, we must take time out of our lives to reach out and thank him, acknowledge our sins and ask for forgiveness, ask him to uphold us and to move us to embrace his word and his grace. And when we falter to seek his strength "not seven times, but seven times seventy."

When we have spiritual healing, we have the peace of God in our hearts and this gives us the strength to face anything the world can throw at us, even death. We must allow the faith in our hearts to shine in our lives and let the Holy Spirit work in us to cleanse our souls and allow us to become instruments of God's love. And with that may we glorify God for never abandoning us and for upholding us no matter what in life may come our way.

And finally, may we be examples of that love in dealing with the world and in dealing with one another, sharing the gift he has given us through his grace "and be kind to one another, tender hearted, forgiving one another, even as God, for Christ's sake, has forgiven you." Amen