

INI

Mark 2,1-12

Trinity 19 — 2 October 2016

Greeting: To those who are called, sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ; mercy, peace, and love be multiplied unto you. Amen.

We hear a portion of the Holy Gospel According to Saint Mark, which was read earlier:

To those hostile Scribes, or Bible scholars, Jesus said: “Which is easier to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven;’ or to say, ‘Arise, and take up your pallet and walk?’¹⁰ But in order that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”– He said to the paralytic,¹¹ “I say to you, rise, take up your pallet and go home.”

So far the reading. Let us pray: Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of our hearts, be acceptable in Thy sight, O LORD, our Strength and our Redeemer. Amen.

Introduction: The initials “S.R.O.” indicate that a play or a sporting event are smash hits. The initials stand for: Standing Room Only. SRO means that the play or sport’s event is a sell out. After the initials S.R.O. go up, you cannot get a seat; you pay full price but you stand at the back, or, where the capacity is full, you cannot get in at all. Even if it isn’t a SRO event, like many Oakland A’s games, there are still scalpers outside waiting to hawk tickets to those who want to pay.

Two thousand years ago we see a situation in Jesus’ life where the initials S.R.O. applied to Jesus as He was teaching in a house in Capernaum. As was usual for the time, Jesus was probably sitting down,

and beside Him, again as was usual, were the scribes, that is, the Bible scholars of Jesus' day. Some of the disciples were there as well. The room, however, was full to overflowing. People stood in the doorway and by the windows. People spilled out from the courtyard into the street. Not only was the house filled to beyond capacity, there was no way to get in.

As Jesus was teaching, four friends of a crippled man came to the house. They were carrying their friend on what we would call a stretcher and had come so that Jesus might heal him. They were confronted by more than a Standing Room Only situation, they were confronted by a sellout. People were everywhere! Was there any way to get in? Yes! In Palestinian houses there was a stairway to the roof. They must have nudged and shoved their way to the stairway and finally, when on the roof, they removed the tiles over the room where Jesus was teaching. Once the tiles were removed, they lowered their friend down to Jesus.

This brings me to the theme for today's sermon, "**Overcoming The Obstacles.**" I'll develop this theme in three points:

1) Obstacles Without and Within

2) The Final Obstacle; and,

3) The Way Is Clear

1) Obstacles Without and Within. By the second chapter of Mark, we have read that Jesus had begun His public ministry. He was teaching and healing and casting out demons around lake Galilee, on whose shores Capernaum was located. This is the area in which Jesus grew up. It was the area in which He called His first disciples, such as Peter, who lived in Capernaum.

Jesus' reputation had spread, and every now and then He needed to

get away from the crowds in order to pray and rest, to renew His spiritual and physical batteries, so to speak. After such a period of rest, He came back to Capernaum. We do not know whether the house in which he came was His own or Peter's – the Bible is not exactly clear and even commentators are divided. But that really does not too much matter.

Jesus came to the house and began to expound “the Word” to those around Him. When we read of “the Word” in the Gospels, it means that Jesus was explaining the Old Testament Scriptures that pointed to the Promise of God that God would send a Messiah. We would call this teaching about the Gospel, or, the Good News. All the Old Testament promises pointed to One Person Whom God would send to be the Messiah, that was Jesus Himself.

All sorts of people were gathered around Jesus, from the common folk of the area to the scribes, or the Bible scholars. Everyone was there to hear Jesus because He taught as “One Who had authority.” The scribes were people who had gone through a long course of training and were certified by their teachers to interpret the Old Testament. They might have been wondering where Jesus got His knowledge or even authority, since He had not gone through such a course of training as they had.

When the friends of the cripple finally lowered their friend to Jesus' feet, Jesus looked at their faith. This was a faith that trusted in Jesus, that trusted that He was the One of Whom the Old Testaments writers had long spoken of. This was a faith that had found a way to get to Jesus, of overcoming the obstacle of the crowd.

Jesus looked at their faith and said, “My son, your sins are forgiven.”

Now we may be a bit taken aback by Jesus' initial response. Hadn't the people brought their friend to be healed? Jesus, now instead of healing the man, had just spoken some words, "My son, your sins are forgiven." Jesus did not even say, "I forgive you," but: "My son, your sins are forgiven."

Now we have to realize that Jewish teaching of the time said that there was no healing without forgiveness. Thus, we read in Psalm 103:

Bless the LORD, O my soul ...
Who pardons all your iniquities,
Who heals all your diseases. (Psalm 103, 1+3)

And there are texts in which "healing" and "forgiveness are interchangeable; thus, in Psalm 41, we read the prayer of David:

As for me, I said, "O LORD, be gracious to me;
Heal my soul, for I have sinned against Thee." (Psalm 41,4)

The scribes knew this, and they also knew that no one can forgive except God Himself. Didn't we just read in Psalm 103 that it is only the LORD "who pardons all your iniquities"? The scribes were there not only to hear Jesus, but also to check out whether His teachings were correct according to their interpretation. They were so intent on catching Jesus in some error that apparently they did not grasp the earlier part of His exposition of the "Word."

Now the scribes held the places of honor around Jesus and they couldn't very well begin to grumble amongst themselves. But they all had the same training and they thought the same thoughts. So Jesus read their "hearts" and asked them, "Which is easier to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven'; or to say, 'Arise and take up your pallet and walk'?"

You see, if the paralytic and his friends faced an outward obstacle, the scribes had an inward obstacle, the hardness of their hearts, which were set against Jesus. In a sense, the scribes were correct in saying that no one could forgive sins except God. What then did that make Jesus? The answer to that question fell outside of their teaching, and so they reasoned that Jesus could only be guilty of blasphemy, of claiming to be the equal of God. That kind of reasoning would soon lead Jesus Himself in overcoming

2) The Final Obstacle. The final obstacle that separates people from God is sin, and the wage of sin is death.

In our earthly lives sin makes itself known in many ways. Think just for a moment of illness, of crime, of war, of hatreds and strife, of loneliness, of broken relationships. of selfishness, of envy, and the list goes on. Our lives will some day all receive the payout of sin, which is death.

Think of the crowd surrounding Jesus. Did they move for the paralytic and his friends? No. The friends had to jostle their way to the roof to find a way to get closer to Jesus. In the same way that the crowds surrounding Jesus had closed their backs to the paralytic and his friends, so the scribes had closed their hearts to Jesus' words. Both of those actions are the result of sin. Indeed, even the sickness that had crippled the paralytic was the result of sin; mind you, perhaps not a specific sin, but the sin which we all inherited from our first parents, Adam and Eve. Sin spread from these two to all people, and with sin came its payout, death.

What finally drove Jesus to the Cross? It was sin. It wasn't Jesus' sin, however; rather, it was the selfishness of the crowds, the hardness of heart of unbelief of the scribes, and every other sin under the sun, really, of sin itself, sin which infects every human being.

On the Cross, as the sin-less Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world, Jesus died once for all. He paid the price of sin itself, and paid the price for the sins of every individual, including ourselves. As true man, Jesus paid the price for us and went to the Cross in our place; as true God, His sacrificial payment, made not with gold or silver, but with His holy and innocent suffering and death and with the shedding of His precious blood, paid the price for all.

There was no Standing Room Only Crowd on Calvary when Jesus died. He died between two thieves. Of His disciples, only John and Jesus' mother and some other women were there. The Roman soldiers were indifferent. The ruling classes were scornful and were there just to see the job of execution got done right. On Good Friday, no one had to worry about crowd control or keeping people away from Jesus.

On the third day, however, Jesus rose again, to show that His was the victory. The victory over sin and its payout, death. Jesus has conquered sin and death, which are the obstacles which stand between us and God. Jesus has also overcome the obstacle of the power of the devil, who would use sin and death as wedges that would keep us from God.

The resurrection of Jesus from the dead is proof that He is God's Son, the Messiah. His word of forgiveness has broken through the unbelief of the scribes, the selfishness of the crowd, and every other obstacle, to show us that God in Christ has come to us and that

3) The Way Is Clear. When Jesus spoke the Word of Forgiveness to the paralytic, Jesus met that man's greatest need. He addressed Him, as "My child", which is a better translation than "My son." To say "child" is a term of endearment, much like a mother would comfort her child, son or daughter.

This is the way in which Jesus comes to us. In Holy Baptism we have been made children of the heavenly Father, for Baptism is a washing away of our sins and declaration that for Jesus' sake God forgives us and adopts us to be His children.

We may wonder at Jesus' words, "Which is harder to say, 'Thy sins be forgiven' or 'Take up your pallet and walk'?" For us, as well as for the scribes, the harder thing to say would be "Take up your pallet and walk." That shows a definite result in the here and now. Anyone could see the result of the healing.

But Jesus' words go deeper, much deeper, with the Word of Forgiveness. This Word of Forgiveness is more than mere words. This Word begins to work a change from the inside out. It works a realization that illness can never be an obstacle that would keep God from coming to us through Christ.

There are many would feel that infirmity is an obstacle to God coming to us. There are others who feel that infirmity of any sort is a mark of God's displeasure. But Jesus says that even though infirmity is a result of sin – perhaps not a specific sin, but sin in general, He has gone to the Cross to forgive us all our sins.

Does Jesus still heal today? The answer is "Yes." Does He heal in every case. The answer is "No." Indeed, even in the New Testament we see Paul wrestling with his "thorn in the flesh." This great man of faith asked for relief, but God gave him strength to endure, so that Paul might always realize that in our weakness Jesus' strength is made known. We pray for healing, but always ask, "Thy will be done," as Jesus Himself prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane. When we ask for forgiveness, however, we need not pray, "Thy will be done." Why not? Because God's will is that we repent of our sins and be forgiven, forgiven for Jesus' sake.

We know that God in Christ has come to us. Come to us to knock down the walls of unbelief or misbelief in our hearts. To knock down the selfishness we might have. To knock down all sins in our lives so that we might show the forgiveness to others which Christ has first shown to us.

Conclusion. There are obstacles in our world just as there were in Jesus' time. Jesus' response is always the same. He points us first to the Cross where the power of sin, death, and the devil has been broken, and then to the empty tomb with its rock that has been rolled away. Jesus did not need the rock to be rolled away in order to have risen from the dead. The rock was rolled away so that the women first and then the disciples might see that now there are no obstacles between God and us. God has come to us in Christ, and stands ready to forgive. Healing may last for a day, but forgiveness lasts for eternity. Amen.

Now, the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

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