

Sermon

February 18 and 19, 2006

Mark 2:1-12

I find myself wondering,  
    why did Jesus say:  
“Son, your sins are forgiven.”?

It’s a surprise.  
    He’s been healing people.  
    You would have expected him to say  
        what he eventually says,  
“Stand up and take up your mat and walk.”

But that’s the first thing that Jesus says this time.  
    First he says,  
        “Son, your sins are forgiven.”

And this is after this man’s 4 friends  
    went to all the trouble of getting their friend,  
        carrying him there,  
    fighting through the crowds,  
        realizing they couldn’t get in through the door,  
        going up on the roof,  
            tearing through,  
                messing up the house  
                    for something more important,  
                and lowering him down to Jesus.

And then Jesus says,  
    “Son, your sins are forgiven.”  
You can imagine the paralyzed man and his friends thinking,  
    “Thanks a lot,  
        but that’s not exactly what we had in mind.”

So, why does Jesus say that,  
    why does he say,  
        “Son, your sins are forgiven.”?

Well,  
what are your sins?

The classic definition of sin  
is to miss the mark.

Every time I hear that definition,  
I think of Confirmation Class.  
Actually, one of the few vivid memories I still have of Confirmation Class.  
My Dad, who was a pastor,  
was the teacher of the class.  
He gave us rubber bands to shoot.  
And he drew a target on the chalkboard.  
And we shot at the target.  
And when we missed,  
he'd say:  
"You just sinned."

Sin is missing the mark.  
It's failing in something.  
It's failing to be what we are created to be.

The religious leaders of Jesus' time  
thought that the paralysis of this man  
was the result of sin.  
He was unclean.  
He was separated from God by his sin—  
—by missing the mark.  
The sin—  
—which was shown by the paralysis—  
was a chasm  
that kept God and this man apart.

So, what does Jesus do?  
If the religious leaders are right,  
then he should heal the man.  
And healed,  
the man would be able to be close to God again.

But Jesus doesn't do it that way.  
He starts by saying,  
    "Son, your sins are forgiven."  
My child,  
    you could translate it,  
        My child—your sins are forgiven.

I have a relationship with you,  
    even in the midst of your paralysis.  
I love you,  
    even though your body is broken.  
You are my child.  
    You are one that I love.  
        Right now.  
            Just the way you are.

Sin may be a chasm.  
    Sin may separate you from God.  
        But I forgive you.  
            I declare to you the forgiveness of God.  
And that chasm is bridged.  
    You and God are reconciled,  
        even though you're still paralyzed.  
            Even though your body is still broken.  
                Even though you're not physically healed.

Your relationship with God  
is not dependant on you having it all fixed.  
    You don't have to be whole.  
    You don't have to have it all figured out.  
    You don't have to perfect.  
God's love is there for you,  
    even in the midst of your sin.

That's what's really important.  
Not that everything in life is perfect.  
Not that our bodies are completely well.  
Not that there is no sickness,  
    or grief,  
    or pain,  
    or loss.

What's really important  
is that God loves us  
    and forgives us  
        just the way we are.

And then sends us out.

Ah, but there was a bonus.  
    Jesus said:  
        "But so that you may know that the Son of Man  
            has authority on earth to forgive sins,  
                he said to the paralytic,  
    I say to you, stand up,  
        take your mat and go to your home."

And he did.

And even now,  
    we tend to think that's more important  
        than Jesus saying:  
    "Son, my child, your sins are forgiven."

But maybe not.  
    Maybe not.  
    Maybe it's that acceptance,  
        that love,  
            that forgiveness  
                in the very midst of our sin  
                that is really important.

And forgiven and loved by God,  
we respond.

Would you please find the page in your bulletin  
that looks like this...  
(Personal Growth Goals)

This week we want to talk about  
next steps.  
What is a next step for you  
in your faith journey?  
What is it that will draw you closer  
to the God who loves you so?  
Where is it that God is sending you out  
like he sent out the paralyzed man?  
Where might God be leading you  
as you continue to grow in faith?

We use a sheet similar to this  
with the new member classes  
here at Good Shepherd.  
But it's not a one-time thing.  
It's not something you do once  
and then you're finished.  
It's something we need to return to  
again and again and again.

Our relationship with God  
is always a journey.  
We never arrive—  
—at least not in this lifetime.  
We continually grow and change.  
So today,  
we're looking at that.

At the top of the page right below  
“GOOD SHEPHERD LUTHERAN CHURCH”  
are the words:  
MAKING CHRIST KNOWN.

These are 3 words that shape much of what we do.  
Making Christ Known.  
As Jesus’ love shines through to us,  
we reflect that light  
to those around us.

Those 3 words,  
MAKING CHRIST KNOWN,  
are a brief summary of our congregational Mission Statement.  
Would you read the whole statement with me:

**Good Shepherd Lutheran Church is a community of Christians, created by God, saved by grace, sustained and nourished by the Holy Spirit. We are empowered by God with diverse gifts, and sent to care for one another, our neighbors and the world. We are committed to proclaiming God’s love and the Good News of Jesus Christ by reaching out with love, by worship through Word and Sacrament, and (by) life-long learning, witness, service, and fellowship.**

We use the 3 words,  
Making Christ Known,  
because it’s really hard to remember the whole paragraph  
we just read.  
But there is good stuff in our mission statement.

One of the things I really like about it  
is that it starts with what God does.  
It starts with God’s love for us.  
That’s how it is for us as people of faith.  
Our life of faith  
doesn’t start with what we do.  
It starts with what God has done  
and continues to do.

God creates us,  
saves us,  
sustains us,  
nourishes us,  
empowers us...  
Forgives us...  
And God sends us.

We are sent into lives of  
Worship  
Learning  
Witness  
Service and  
Fellowship.

I want to ask you to do a couple of things  
this week as you look at your Personal Growth Goals.  
One is to make a commitment.  
In the announcement section of the bulletin,  
there is piece of paper where you can write a growth goal  
and tear it off.  
Put it in an envelope  
from the pew.  
Seal it.  
And put it in the offering plate,  
or in a basket at the end of worship.  
Put your name on the outside.  
Your mailbox # if you know it.

We're not going to open these.  
Nobody else will read them.  
But in about a month,  
we'll return them to you.  
As a reminder.  
As a time to see how it's going for you.

The other thing I'm asking you to do  
is to talk about these growth goals.  
There are questions right on the page  
to guide your conversation.  
The community of faith  
can be a great support to you  
as you wonder together  
about how God is calling you to grow in faith.  
We're all at different points in our journey.  
Our answers will be different—  
—but we all reflect the love of God  
as we follow where Jesus leads the way.

So look at the goals listed on the page (review).  
And notice that there are blank lines.  
Because maybe your next step  
doesn't quite match up with the bullet points that are there.

And remember,  
God loves you in the midst of the journey,  
not because you are perfect.  
God says to you,  
“My child,  
your sins are forgiven”  
even in the midst of the struggles of life.

And then God also says to you and to me,  
in the words from our Baptism,  
on the bottom of the page  
(would you read it with me):

**Let your light so shine before others  
that they may see your good works  
and glorify your Father in Heaven.”**

In Jesus' name,  
Amen