

Text: Mark 2:1-12
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Location: Zion Lutheran Church- North Battleford, SK.
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Grace and Peace be unto you from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

One only has to turn on the evening news, open a newspaper, or talk to a close friend to quickly realize that we live in a hurting and troubled world. Terrorism, war, pollution, and natural disasters are only a few of the things in our world that seem to threaten our lives and our safety.

And, of course, closer to home things most likely are not any better. For we all experience trouble at work, division in our families, poorness of health of either ourselves or our loved ones, and threats to our children and security.

As your pastor (and as person who lives in the same world that you do) I know that you wrestle with these problems. Try as I might, I cannot make them go away. I cannot cure cancer, I cannot insure that your children make the right choices when confronted by evil, I cannot even make the bills that haunt and suffocate you go away.

But what I can offer you is good news. Let me reassure you that you are not alone in the struggles of your life. I can tell you with all honesty that the same things that keep you up at night worrying are the same things that trouble your neighbour. I know that our fears can often leave us feeling isolated and alone- but trust me, you are not alone.

I am reminded of a story that Billy Graham tells about an experience early on in his ministry. Early on in his ministry as he was preparing for a crusade, he contacted the local ministerial association of the city (Chicago) that he was to attend. He mailed them a letter and asked if there were any people with problems and troubles that he should pray for during his nightly crusades. A few short days later the ministerial association replied, they sent him a copy of Chicago's phone book!

Considering all of this- all of our troubles, pains and worries- why do we gather on Sunday mornings and celebrate? Where do we find our joy?

We find our joy in the liberation and salvation that Christ has made possible for us (Rom. 14:17). We gather together with the burden of the world on our shoulders, but then we hear the gospel and our faith is stirred and we know God's goodness and purpose for us. We know that while the troubles and worries of life may come and go, God's love and righteousness endure forever. We confess our sins and recognize that we have fallen short of the glory that God intended for us (Rom. 3:23)

There are many within the Christian Church that say we shouldn't talk about our sinfulness anymore. They contend that people in this age of relativity and self-esteem don't want to hear that they are not "perfect". Furthermore, pastors shouldn't preach sermons that remind people that their lives are riddled with fear, doubt and problems. Rather we should just be preaching "happy day" sermons that say "God loves you", "everyone else loves you", and "you're perfect just the way that you are".

But as those classic words from The Lutheran Book of Worship remind us, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us." The fact that we are in "bondage to sin" should come as no shock to any Lutheran or any Christian, for that matter. If we look into our hearts we will realize that we have not always loved our neighbors with our whole hearts (Luke 10:27). We realize that we have not always put God at the centre of our lives.

If our experience of God and his Holy Word ended here, there would be no gospel, there would be no good news- we would just be failures with one more thing to worry about: our salvation.

Thankfully as Christians gathered under the cross of Christ we know that ours is not a God of despair and failure, but rather ours is a Lord of joy and hope. For as we come before God with heavy hearts and burdened spirits, we hear those simple and powerful words of divine compassion: Your sins are forgiven!

What gives these simple words such power is the Lord that speaks them and our faith which hears and responds to them.

Our faith is important in hearing and comprehending these words, for without faith these words will simply float by us as their meaning is lost. It would be like a doctor pronouncing a patient "cured" without the patient even knowing they were

sick to begin with.

As I speak about faith, I am reminded of the story of the famous French Tightrope walker of the 19th century.

Now this tightrope walker was famous throughout all of Europe for his death-defying acts and bravery. Now always looking for a bigger challenge he decided to bring his act to North America where he would attempt his most difficult tightrope walk to date.

What he did was string a steel cable across Niagara Falls to make the dangerous walk. Now when the fateful day came, a large crowd had gathered to see this man attempt this great feat. Many people were making side bets about whether he would die or not...

Well when the time came, the man walked through the forming crowd and stepped on the tightrope. However, he brought something odd with him... With him as he walked across the tightrope he pushed an empty wheelbarrow. Slowly and surely the great acrobat made it across the tightrope with his wheelbarrow.

Now when he arrived at the other side of the falls, people greeted him with great cheers and accolades. They believed he was a hero as they shouted, "Amazing!" and "You're the greatest!". Now, all of a sudden as the crowd continued to work itself up into a frenzy they began shouting, "Do it again! Do it again!".

Now the tightrope walker looked at one of the people yelling and said to him, "Do you want me to do it again?" To which the man replied, "Yes! Absolutely." Then the tightrope walker asked, "Do you think I will make it and not hurt myself?" "You're the best, you won't have any problems- I have complete faith in you!" "Good," said the tightrope walker, "Then you get in the wheelbarrow." To which the man responded, "No way!"

You see, faith is never something just to be talked about. It is something that must be demonstrated in the way we live. Paul Harvey once said, "If you don't live it, you don't believe it." There's Biblical basis for that statement. James said, "Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works." (James 2:18).

Faith is not just thought about, faith is not just talked about- faith is also something that is lived out.

Today in our gospel story we hear of how Jesus forgave and healed a paralyzed man. It is a fascinating and powerful story that tells of four friends who carry their paralytic friend to Christ for healing.

When they arrive at the place that Christ was staying, they were greeted by a large crowd that made entrance into Christ's house impossible. But not to be deterred they carried their friend to the roof, made an opening and lowered him down into Christ's presence.

Now in doing so, Christ didn't just see this act- Christ "saw their faith" (Mk 2:5). And it is this faith which moved Christ to forgive the sins of the paralytic and heal him.

Now when we are told that Christ "saw their faith", what does that mean? It means that theirs was an active faith that not only knew that God could heal their friend, but that carried their friend to God. In other words, these men rolled up their sleeves and made something happen.

To be sure, there is a lesson for each of us in today's reading. For our faith is not meant to be something of just the heart or the mind- our faith is also meant to call us to action. Our God given faith is meant to stir us, to provoke us, to cause us to dream about the seemingly impossible.

God responds to our faith. God calls us to bring our burdens, our fears, our doubts, and our ills to him. Will we encounter obstacles along the way? Surely we will. But just like those five men who climbed to the roof and threw the shingles aside, we are called to not give up, to not lose heart, to continue on in the face of adversity.

I started today by stating that life is hard. That daily we face fears, trouble, and tribulations. Nothing that I have said has changed that. The problems that we left at home will still be there when we return.

However, what I hope has changed is us. For we have heard God's Holy Word. We see in the love of Christ that God is with us- loving us and forgiving us. No matter how much fear, doubt, or illness may surround us- nothing can separate us from the love of God (Rom 8:39).