

The Nineteenth Sunday after Trinity, A²D 2010

Matthew 9:1-8

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

1 It would be easier—and arguably more fun—to be a Buddhist than a Christian. If you were a Buddhist or a Gnostic or any religion or heresy that denies that the body is a good creation from God, you'd have an easy answer to your bodily suffering. Why does your body break down and hurt? Because the body is evil. Matter is evil; spirit is good. So the goal is for your spirit to break free from your body to be joined to some ethereal god-ness. It would be easier to believe all that, but it wouldn't be Christian. And it wouldn't be true.

2 You are not just a spirit or a soul. You live with a body, and you have to deal with all the frailties of your body. God has knit your soul and body together; they are both His good creation. Your body is a good gift from God, His creation. If the Day of Christ's return doesn't happen before then, you will die. And, unless you have your body destroyed in the violence of fire, at the gravesite, I will say, "May God the Father who created this body; God the Son, who by His blood redeemed this body; may God the Holy Spirit who by Holy Baptism sanctified this body to be His temple, keep these remains to the day of the resurrection of all flesh."

3 God created you: body and soul. He feeds you with His body and blood: body and soul. And He inhabits you as His temple: body and soul. While the separation of soul from body that happens at death permits your body to rest from its labors and your soul to rest with Jesus, this separation is not good. Good is when that Day comes and the Risen Christ calls your body from the grave and knits body and soul back together. Your body is a good gift from God. Worshiping the body is as sinful as abusing it. Vain pursuits of bodily perfection—surgical enhancements, incessant dieting, and more—is as spiritually unhealthy as laziness and neglect of the body.

4 The desire for healing, for bodily restoration is good. If your body is a gift from God, if, as Scripture and the catechism teach, He gives you enough to support your body and life for as many days as He gives you breath, what hope do you have in the midst of suffering and sickness? Healing services are exceedingly popular, even when the healings are suspect. People want to believe in a God who works through means and men to heal them of their afflictions. A feeble faith can hardly survive bodily calamity: cancer that grows out of control, pain that doesn't abate, suffering that will not lessen, or worse. What do you do when your prayers for health and wholeness seem to go unanswered? Where is God in the midst of pain? If He has given you this body, why does He not better take care of it, shielding it from decay and disease? Repent of these doubts. God fully desires to heal you completely.

5 Do you want to see miraculous healing? Do not gather around a faith-healer. Gather instead around the Giver of faith. When the friends of a paralytic bring him to Jesus, Jesus saw their faith and declared to the paralytic, "Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven." Christ did not heal outwardly first so as not to be praised merely as a great physician, but He healed inwardly first and healed to demonstrate that He is the Physician of Soul and Body. When Jesus forgave the paralytic, some of the scribes said to themselves, "This man is blaspheming. Who can forgive sins except God alone?" But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, "Why do you think evil in your hearts? For which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise and walk'? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—He said to the paralytic—"Rise, pick up your bed and go home." And the once-paralyzed man stood up and walked home.

6 Which is easier, to say, "Your sins are forgiven," or to say, "Rise and walk?" Which is easier, to forgive sins or to cure paralysis? False alternatives. Jesus ministry of healing is inextricably connected to His forgiving sins. He is God in human flesh, Immanuel, God with His people. He bears our flesh, having

taken human flesh in the Virgin's womb. Why is this man paralyzed? Why does paralysis even exist? Why is there sickness and suffering? Because of sin. Before mankind's fall into sin, sickness was unheard of. "Death" was not a real thing, not anything that happened, anyway, just the spoken-of consequence of sin not yet committed. Not that this man committed any particular sin to make him paralyzed, but that he is a sinner is the reason for his handicap. That you are a sinner is the reason for your body's decay, both in the grave and out of it.

7 Jesus didn't come merely to heal paralysis, which is only a symptom. He came to deal with the real problem: sin. He can declare the paralytic's sins forgiven and have His words do exactly what they say—forgive sins—because He came to take away sins. He took the sins of the paralytic, of all humans all the way back to Adam, and of all humans until the end of time. He who knew no sin, the Sinless Son of God, took them and claimed them as His own. And He died on the cross in order to speak these words to the paralytic: I forgive you. He died likewise to speak this word to you: I forgive you. He came to take away sin and to remove all of its ill effects.

8 The problem with faith healers and healing services is not that God doesn't heal. He does, and He might even do it still today through men. The problem is that they're short-sighted; they miss the point. Healing is not the goal; life is the goal. Even those who seemingly have their bad backs and cancerous lungs healed by faith-healers still stare the grave in the face. Death is the real consequence of sin; all these other maladies are only signs of death. So God died. He who spoke words of healing both for the paralytic's soul and his body is He who came to die for sin and to rise victorious from the grave. He came to pay for sin and to leave death dead.

9 Do you want healing for your body? Good. Get forgiveness. As Jesus demonstrated in the Gospel reading, forgiveness and healing go hand-in-hand. Moreover, forgiveness and resurrection go hand-in-hand. When in Holy Baptism, God delivered faith and forgiveness of sins, He joined you into the resurrection of Christ. You who have been baptized and who retain the gift of faith delivered therein will rise and live with Jesus eternally. Your ailments will be forever ended when eternal life is fully yours on the Day of His return. Do you want healing? Get absolution. When Jesus forgave the paralytic, he assured his resurrection, his perfect and complete healing; the temporary relief from paralysis was just icing on the cake and an outward demonstration to the Pharisees and scribes that the internal forgiveness had occurred. So in Holy Absolution, when through the mouths and hands of men, God forgives your sins and keeps you steadfast in the grace bestowed to you in Baptism, He guarantees your resurrection and perfect healing. You have a God who works through means and men to heal you.

10 Do you want healing for your body? Eat the Body of Jesus. Jesus has a body. The same body which was crucified, which rose from the grave, which lives and ascended into heaven, which sits at the right hand of God the Father and reigns over creation is the Body He gives you in His Supper. That Jesus feeds you with His body is proof that He cares about your body. This is the medicine of immortality. Nothing else heals you like the Body and Blood of Jesus in His Supper. Nothing else saves you from death, for where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation. You are body and soul together, and through His means of grace, Jesus cares for you completely—body and soul together and gives healing and health to your whole person.

In the name of the Father and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria

Pastor Jeff Hemmer