

Introduction

Check-in & Introductions

Being Forgiven

Gospel Lesson

Luke 5:17-26 (NRSVUE)

¹⁷One day while he was teaching, Pharisees and teachers of the law who had come from every village of Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem were sitting nearby, and the power of the Lord was with him to heal. ¹⁸Just then some men came carrying a paralyzed man on a stretcher. They were trying to bring him in and lay him before Jesus, ¹⁹but, finding no way to bring him in because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and let him down on the stretcher through the tiles into the middle of the crowd in front of Jesus. ²⁰When he saw their faith, he said, "Friend, your sins are forgiven you." ²¹Then the scribes and the Pharisees began to question, "Who is this who is speaking blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?" ²²When Jesus perceived their questionings, he answered them, "Why do you raise such questions in your hearts? ²³Which is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Stand up and walk'? ²⁴But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—he said to the one who was paralyzed—"I say to you, stand up and take your stretcher and go to your home." ²⁵Immediately he stood up before them, took what he had been lying on, and went to his home, glorifying God. ²⁶Amazement seized all of them, and they glorified God and were filled with fear, saying, "We have seen incredible things today."

Bible/Sermon Focus

It was a commonly held idea during Biblical times that if a person had an ailment of any kind, that ailment was rooted in sin. If a person was sick, short term or long term, it was thought that either they had sinned or their parents had sinned. Many Christians now-a-days have learned that or heard that at church before. And we understand that before the advancement of science and medicine, humans came up with all kinds of explanations for why we experienced sickness. But let's go a bit deeper with this commonly held idea of Biblical times.

If you were sick, you would find yourself wondering *what* sin got you to your current state. What exactly had you done wrong? What had your parent done wrong? Every time your medical condition drew your attention, you'd go back to thinking about sin. Your relationship to your illness was rooted in a God who holds you accountable to your sins by harming you.

We are beginning a sermon series this week on forgiveness, and a common theme we will see come up will be our theology of God, how we think about God. In our story for today we see that Biblical model of a God who slays our flesh when we sin, and if the illness sticks around, that must mean that God just hasn't forgiven us yet.

In this story Jesus is confronted with a paralyzed man on a stretcher, carried there by other members of the community. And it was so crowded, they lowered him in through the roof. How far had they walked? What kind of life did this man live? How convicted of his right to healing and how much compassion did those who carried him have to have to get that man all the way to Jesus, and then up and on the roof, and then to lower him. And Jesus witnesses to

their faith and then says, "Friend, your sins are forgiven you." And then the scribes and the Pharisees are in an uproar.

The scribes and the Pharisees had an opportunity in that moment to witness to a God who heals through forgiveness and they couldn't do it. We don't hear them mention that a group of people had helped this man get to Jesus. We don't hear of them helping. We only are told that they say, "Who is this who is speaking blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

They cannot imagine that Jesus (or maybe even that God) is willing to forgive sins. So, then Jesus changes course and tells the man to get up, and he does! Then everyone praised God. Perhaps it is easier to believe that we can be healed than to believe we can be forgiven. Again, we will explore that idea more in weeks to come.

But here's what we are to glean today. That upon forgiveness, this man, the community, and all who witness it are changed. When we are forgiven, when we live as one who has been forgiven, our lives are different. Receiving the grace, mercy, and forgiveness of God is life altering. And those of us who have experienced that forgiveness may also find ourselves carrying others to the feet of Jesus to experience the same grace.

Discussion Questions

1. Share a story of being forgiven.
2. How good are you at forgiving others?
3. Reflect on this quote from Cole Arthur Riley, *"A friend once explained to me the second and often forgotten part of apology, which I now believe to be one of holiest: when one asks to be forgiven. Mercy requires nothing from the offender, but to ask forgiveness is to shift the balance of power in favor of the wounded. It requires you to become vulnerable to their denial."*
4. Do you believe that God has forgiven your sins? Are there unforgivable sins?

Prayer

God of Forgiveness, we pray for pardon for the times we have limited your love and your reach in our world. Cleanse our hearts to live in a hope that restores and heals in your name. Guide us to be the ones carrying the mat of those stricken with guilt, lead us to sit at the bedside of those stricken with sickness. Give us the wisdom to know that those are different things. **Amen.**

"Forgiveness is the fragrance the violet sheds on the heel that has crushed it." -Mark Twain