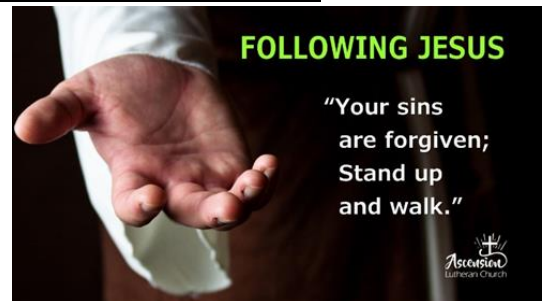


THE POWER OF THE LORD WAS WITH HIM TO HEAL AND FORGIVE

Some will taunt believers, saying religion is just a story we tell to comfort ourselves.

- Jesus himself would get in their faces right away on that one. Jesus could be edgy that way.
- Those who knew Jesus would laugh at the foolishness of modern prideful doubters.
- Those who were there with Jesus had seen the reality of Jesus' power.
- Jesus was someone you needed to take seriously. You still do!



Yes, Jesus came to save, but don't overdo the image of Jesus "meek and mild;" he wasn't.

- Jesus didn't dodge conflict, he embraced it.
- Jesus took on the destructive powers of this fallen world... and won.

This summer we've been following Jesus through the early days of his public ministry in chapters 4 and 5 of the Gospel of Luke. So far in just these two chapters:

- People from his own hometown tried to throw Jesus off a cliff, but he stared them down.
- While teaching in the local synagogue, he silences a demonic verbal assault.
- In order to heal a fever, he "rebukes" it.
- He heals broken bodies & hearts at the same time as he battles the spiritual evils involved.
- Jesus was also a man of fierce intellect combined with a poet's surgical skill with words. You didn't want to take him on, but he'd take you on if you needed it, and you might need it.
- This is not the stuff of "Jesus meek and mild."

Where we pick up Jesus' story today, he is gaining both fame and suspicion. His popularity is going viral. But skulking at the edges of the adoring crowds, the first foot soldiers of a new enemy are now showing up, the first scouts of the Pharisees, the puritanical enforcers of the Jewish religious codes of conduct.

In Luke, this is where the ongoing battle with the Pharisees begins, a battle that will continue throughout the rest of Jesus' entire ministry.

- This is the group, along with the Sadducees, that will eventually engineer Jesus' death. But we all know, Jesus still won that one too!
- Each gospel story is not only a story; it's an argument, often in response to the religious opposition of the Pharisees.

Today's story is that wonderful one about a clever group of guys bringing their paralyzed friend to Jesus for healing. Mark, the oldest of the gospels, adds some interesting details missing in Luke.

- First, that it happened in Capernaum, the city in which Jesus' early-ministry was based.

- Mark also starts the story this way, “It was heard that he [Jesus] was at home.” So, we learn that Jesus had a home (well, of course he did!) and his home was in Capernaum.

You know the story:

- Because of Jesus’ popularity, the home is packed, so full the men with their friend on a stretcher can’t get in.
- Determined and resourceful, the guys haul their friend up on the roof of the home.
- This isn’t as weird as it might sound. In this hot climate, roofs were living areas. Houses often had external stairways to them. Holes could be made in these roofs.
- Again, Mark adds the details, “They dug an opening and let down the pallet.”
- Rather than angry about the big hole in his roof, Jesus seems delighted by their audacity and tenacity to make sure their friend got to Jesus.

Verse 20 says, “When he saw their faith, he said, “Friend, your sins are forgiven you.”

- Notice it is the faith of the friends, not the paralyzed man, that Jesus comments on.
- Yes, faith is a personal thing, but faith is also a shared community thing.
- And how can personal faith develop except that the community of faith first persists in working to bring someone to Jesus? What a picture of the mission of the church that is.

The question of if Jesus has the power to heal sins is actually what this whole story is all about.

- “Blasphemy!” the Scribes and Pharisees cry, “Who can forgive except God alone?”
- “Exactly,” the gospel agrees, silently making the point that this is who Jesus is, God.

Jesus responds, “Which is easier - just saying, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to actually heal someone?”

- Jesus does heal him, but more than just a sign that he does have the power to forgive, there’s a hidden logical argument here.
- The Pharisees, like many in that day, tended to blame the sufferer or victim. If suffering or sickness happened, they insisted it was due to the person having sinned. This is the same point Job’s friends make in accusation against him.

The Bible says it isn’t so. Jesus says it isn’t so.

But Jesus skewers the Pharisees on their own logic.

- If sickness is a result of sin, and if the man was healed.
- That means his sin had to have been successfully forgiven in order for the healing to happen.

Jesus wins again.

The conflict stories will continue. But Jesus will emerge victorious in each.

- For you to also emerge victorious at the end of your own story, your soul, too, needs Jesus.
- Has the battle of saving faith been won for you yet?
- Have we at least faithfully done our part to try to carry you to Jesus for forgiveness and healing? This is the first job of the church.
- If not, we’ll keep trying. Amen.