

Authority Among Men

Matthew 9:35-10:8

The Second Sunday after Pentecost, June 18, 2017

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

Last Sunday we heard from Matthew 28 that Jesus sent His apostles to all of the nations. This Sunday we hear from Matthew 10 that Jesus sent His apostles to the lost sheep of the house of Israel and specifically prohibited them from going among the nations or even among the Samaritans, in case the apostles were wondering. It is hard sometimes when the lectionary presents things out of order. Formerly Jesus commanded His apostles to go only to Israel. Then after He was crucified and raised He told them to go to all of the nations. Formerly He told them to preach that the Kingdom of heaven had come near. After He was crucified and raised, He tells them to baptize and to teach the nations everything. At the beginning of Matthew's Gospel and at chapter 10 the Kingdom of heaven has come near. By the time the crucifixion and resurrection are accomplished the Kingdom of heaven has come and now all one needs is entry into it.

Perhaps these kinds of considerations which are often obtain in such a mission oriented congregation as ours distract us from what our Lord is actually doing in Matthew, chapter 10.

Earlier Jesus had taken great pains to show that He had the authority to forgive sins. Some people brought Him a paralyzed man. Since they could not get to Him because of the crowd they took the paralyzed man on his mat onto the roof and lowered him through the tiles in front of Jesus. When Jesus saw their faith He said to the paralyzed man, "Your sins are forgiven." The scribes who happened to be there at the time said that Jesus was blaspheming. They pointed out that no one has the authority to forgive sins except God alone. Since they believed that Jesus was not God, they thought that He was blaspheming by telling the paralyzed man that his sins were forgiven.

Our Lord then asks them a simple question. Which is easier to say to a paralyzed man? Your sins are forgiven? Or stand up and walk?

Now let us pause there and answer the question. If someone were paralyzed in a nursing home and you were going to visit them and you could say only two these two things to them, which would you say? Would you tell a paralyzed person that his sins were forgiven? Or would you tell a paralyzed person to stand up and walk? If you go into the nursing home room where the paralyzed person is lying and tell him that his sins are forgiven, there is no visible way to verify whether or not his sins are forgiven. Even if his sins are not forgiven and you are lying to him, no one will be any the wiser because forgiveness is invisible and you will not look like a fool. But if you go in there and tell the paralyzed man to get up and walk and he does not do it, you will look like a fool. The paralyzed man may even believe that you have gone in there to mock him. The reason that you look like a fool is because whether or not he gets up and walks at your command can be verified immediately. Either he gets up or he does not. The only way for you not to look like a fool is for you to be able to actually heal him such that he gets up and walks when you tell him to.

This means that it is easier to say that your sins are forgiven than it is to say get up and walk.

Now, if a person can do a simple thing, it remains to be seen whether or not they can do a hard thing. If a person can do a simple thing, they may or may not be able to do something hard. However, if a person can do a hard thing, that means that they can do simple things also. If a person can do calculus, he can add. If a person can bench press 250lbs they can bench press 100. If Jesus can tell a paralyzed person

to stand and walk and he stands up and walks, then Jesus can also tell him that his sins are forgiven and they are.

Your Lord then performs the miracle and tells the man to stand up and walk and to take his bed and go home. The paralyzed man stands up, picks up his bed, and goes out in full view of them all. Therefore Jesus has the authority to forgive sins.

Now why does Jesus not mention that He is also God? He does not say it anywhere in the passage. What I am asking is this. If the scribes say that only God can forgive sins and Jesus is God why doesn't Jesus offer His miracle as proof of His divinity? Why doesn't Jesus tell the scribes, "Hey guys, calm down. I happen to be God. It is ok for me to forgive sins. Here, I'll prove it to you. I'll make this guy walk." Curiously Jesus leaves out of the discussion any mention of His divinity unless you are smart enough to realize that when He calls Himself the Son of Man that is in reference to the divine figure when He appears in the Old Testament. But even in spite of that reference Matthew carefully records that the people glorified God who had given such authority among men.

You see everybody knows that God can forgive sins. The question is can a man forgive sins before God? Jesus is not proving that He can forgive sins because He is God. He is proving that in spite of the fact that He is human He can forgive sins. Matthew records for us that the people rejoiced that such authority, that is the authority to forgive sins, was given to men.

Men have the authority to forgive sins before God. That is one of the wonders of the incarnation of our Lord. He brings into our fallen humanity all kinds of wonderful things. The chief wonder that He brings to our humanity is the authority to forgive sins before God.

To put it in an extreme way, even if Jesus were not God, as long as God had given Him the authority to heal the paralyzed man, God had also given Him the authority to forgive sins.

Notice how the authority of your Lord operates. Forgiveness of sins is doled out together with healing. In fact healing is a hallmark of the Kingdom of heaven. Many times your Lord appears preaching the Kingdom of heaven and heals many people at the same time. The coming of the kingdom is accompanied by healing. Being a member of the kingdom means not only being forgiven, but also being healed. It means having your demons cast out. In Matthew 12 your Lord will argue with the Pharisees and point out to them that if He is casting out demons by the power of God, then the Kingdom of heaven has actually come to you. The Kingdom does not come without also bringing with it the forgiveness of sins, healing, the casting out of demons and since the Kingdom comes in the resurrection of your Lord, then the kingdom comes also in resurrections.

Now, get a load of this. Your Lord gives to twelve guys whom He names apostles the authority to do exactly that. If the authority to forgive sins is given to men and not necessarily because the man in question is also God, the men who are not God can and do possess the authority to forgive sins in front of God. Not only will they possess that authority they will possess all of the other authority that comes with the coming of the Kingdom of heaven.

Who are these twelve guys? Well, here are their names: Simon, who will later be called Peter, Andrew, Peter's brother, James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Philip and Bartholomew, Thomas and Matthew, the tax collector, James, the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus, Simon, the Cananaean, and Judas Isacriot who betrayed Him.

We know that our Lord commanded them not to go among the Gentiles, but look at what He did tell them to do! Preach saying, "The Kingdom of heaven is at hand." Heal the sick. Raise the dead. Purify lepers. Cast out demons. Freely you received. Freely give. He gave them authority over unclean spirits to cast them out and to heal every disease.

Now, Jesus is going to look pretty dumb if His apostles go out and are not able to do those things. Christianity would not exist unless the apostles went out and did exactly those things. It is a lie for the apostles to go out and to preach that the Kingdom of heaven has come near to people and not also raise their dead, cast out their demons, purify their lepers, and heal their sick, since those are the marks of the kingdom.

And so what do the apostles do? They go out. They preach that the Kingdom of heaven has come near. They raise the dead. They heal the sick. They purify the lepers. They cast out demons. They do all of these things only because Jesus told them to do them. If Jesus had not told them to do those things, they would have been utterly unable to do them.

God had given such authority among men!

Now, think about that.

Simon wound up denying His Lord three times at the time when his Lord needed him the most and after he had promised his Lord that he would not do so. James and John are called sons of thunder because they lose their tempers easily. People reject Jesus in Samarian and James and John want to call fire down from heaven to destroy them. Thomas would later doubt the Lord's resurrection because he lacked faith. Matthew was a tax collector. Who knows how many people he had gouged and cheated over the years? Matthew's Gospel calls Simon a Cananaean, but the other Gospels are more blunt. They call him a zealot. The Zealots were a political party at the time that believed that military action should be taken against the Romans to drive them out. He was a political extremist and it would be hard to believe that he was not a hot head. And let us not forget Judas Iscariot who betrayed Him. Yes, even Judas Iscariot went out with the authority of his Lord and preached that the Kingdom of heaven had come near. Even Judas Iscariot cast out demons, healed the sick, purified lepers, and raised the dead!

When it says that the authority to do these things was given among men it means that it was given among men! Among sinners! This shows that it is not the sinner or his sins that count, but whether or not they have the authority of Jesus. If they have the authority of Jesus in accord with their vocations, they heal the sick, they purify lepers, they cast out demons, they raise the dead, and they preach that the Kingdom of Heaven has come.

Now the people to whom the apostles were sent no longer have to go to Jesus in order to get their sins forgiven. The people to whom the apostles came no longer have to go to Jesus in order to get their demons cast out. The people to whom the apostles came no longer have to go to Jesus in order to have their sick healed, their lepers purified, or their dead raised. The people who heard the apostles no longer have to go to Jesus to know and believe that the Kingdom of heaven had come near. They have heard it and received these things from the ones that Jesus sent and such authority has been given among men.

Jesus does this because He has compassion on the crowds. They are harassed and helpless like sheep not having a shepherd. Jesus does this because the harvest is much and the laborers are few. That is why your Lord exhorts you to pray that He would send out laborers into His harvest. And so He sent them out and when He sends them out, He gives them authority and such authority has been given among men.

And that is really the take home point folks. This authority to cast out demons, raise the dead, purify lepers, heal the sick, to forgive sins and to announce the Kingdom of heaven has been given among ... men!

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.