



Luke 5:22–26

22 Jesus knew what they were thinking and asked, ‘Why are you thinking these things in your hearts? 23 Which is easier: to say, “Your sins are forgiven,” or to say, “Get up and walk”? 24 But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.’ So he said to the paralysed man, ‘I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.’ 25 Immediately he stood up in front of them, took what he had been lying

on and went home praising God.
26 Everyone was amazed and gave praise to God. They were filled with awe and said, ‘We have seen remarkable things today.’

Reflection

(Today’s reflection is given by Justin Mofatt)

Here is our text:

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on earth to forgive sins.’ So he said to the paralysed man, ‘I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.’ 25 Immediately he stood up in front of them, took what he had been lying on and went home praising God. 26 Everyone was amazed and gave praise to God. They were filled with awe and said, ‘We have seen remarkable things today.’

Verse 22, Jesus knew what they were thinking... Those six words are interesting by themselves. It could be that he knows their modus operandi – their ‘way of thinking’. Perhaps he has seen it before. Mind you, in Luke’s Gospel, this is his first recorded encounter with this group of people. They will ‘journey’ against him all the

way to the cross. But it could be that he just knows that this group of people are more likely to be cynical, rather than open. A little bit like we know what a particular politician might say before they say it.

But given the context, Jesus' pronouncement of the forgiveness of sins for the crippled man, and that this seems to the Pharisees to be a claim to divinity, this becomes interesting. Does Jesus know what we are thinking in our hearts? Now? And if he does, he truly knows me. Which is good news, and sobering news. It means he knows me more than I know me. But it also means he knows my sin, he knows the secrets of my heart.

Psalm 44:20:

If we had forgotten the name of our God ...

would not God have discovered it, since he knows the secrets of the heart?

Or Romans 2:16:

‘This will take place on the day when God judges people’s secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares.’

Let’s keep going with the story. The context of the passage is that a group of men, who love their paralysed friend, have discovered Jesus. They’ve heard about him. And they are open to the fact that in Jesus, healing is found. But they can’t get to Jesus because of the crowd, so they messily

dig a hole in the roof of the house where Jesus is teaching. They lower their friend down to Jesus, who is standing in all the clay and rubble. Jesus doesn't say 'Son, get up and take your mat and go home', as his friends were expecting. But rather, 'your sins are forgiven'.

Amazing. A 'felt need': being paralysed. And a 'real need': having his sins forgiven. Jesus, as we know, dealt with the felt need. But not before dealing with the real need.

But the interesting moment here is that the religious types grumble that only God can forgive sins. And they have a point. Only the wronged party can forgive someone. You see that, don't you? If someone wrongs you, and I tell him or her 'I forgive

you', you can say 'hold on, you don't have that right'.

But what if God is wronged, every time we wrong one of his creatures, whom he loves? And what if Jesus is God, such that he is the wronged one every time we lie, or hurt, or destroy someone? What if 'he alone can forgive sins'?

22 Jesus knew what they were thinking and asked, 'Why are you thinking these things in your hearts?'

Why so closed? Why so cynical? Why so unbelieving? Then he poses an interesting question to help them reflect on what has happened.

Think:

It is a riddle of sorts.

23 Which is easier: to say, “Your sins are forgiven,” or to say, “Get up and walk”?

Try to answer the question. Which is easier? And why? I’ll pose Jesus’ question again:

23 Which is easier: to say, “Your sins are forgiven,” or to say, “Get up and walk”?

Truth is: they are both hard to say, and both easy to say! You can say them. That’s easy. But they are such risky things to say.

I take it that it is easier to say your sins are

forgiven, because, although audacious, no one can prove it. It is harder to say 'get up and walk', because everyone will know in seconds if you are a fraud. So Jesus says he will do the 'harder' thing to prove he can do the 'easier' thing, and so show them his identity.

24 But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.' So he said to the paralysed man, 'I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.'

And he got up, and he rolled up his mat, and he went home! And they praised God, and said: 'We have seen remarkable things today.' Namely, that Jesus can forgive sins!

Pray

Thank God that Jesus has authority to forgive your sins. Since this is true, you can name the sins to God, and ask him to forgive you. The one thing you can't do is defend them. Don't defend them. Rather name them now to God. But have confidence that they are forgiven. He knows your heart, which would be scary, except for the strong and healing grace of God. As Paul reflected yesterday:

‘This is how it is with God too, for God so loved the world that he made the ultimate sacrifice for us. He dug, so to speak, through the roof of our world and lowered his Son down so Jesus could die for our sins.’

Go home (or to work or your play or your studies) praising God saying ‘We have heard remarkable things today.’