

**St Paul's Lutheran Church (Latimer, IA)**  
**Trinity 19 – October 6, 2024**  
**Matthew 9:1-8 – Get into the House**  
**Rev Peter Wagner**

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

When Jacob fled from his brother Esau, running for his life, he had nowhere to go and nothing to his name. Not even a pillow for his head, only a rock.

And really, Jacob deserved all these troubles. He was a cheater and a fraud, always only out for number one. He didn't know or honor God, he was totally ignorant. Up to this point, all his energy had been devoted to scamming his elder brother out of the inheritance: stealing the birthright and blessing for himself. No wonder Esau hated him. But in spite of it all, even though there was nothing good in Jacob, God loved this sinner.

So God came to him that night in a dream. And in the dream of the ladder up to heaven, God renewed with Jacob all the promises he made before to Abraham and Isaac. Land, offspring, and blessing. More than that, God promised to be with Jacob and protect him always. "Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land. For I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you."

What undeserved promises! Why God? Why shower such a sinner with so many blessings?

God was turning Jacob towards the path of faith, waking him up to bring him to his senses. So when Jacob awoke, he said, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it." And he was afraid, terrified to finally realize his sin and ignorance of God. He said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven."

We are very much like Jacob. We deserve nothing from our God for all our sin. There is nothing good in us. We deserve the troubles that come upon us, just as Jacob deserved to be fleeing from Esau. But in spite of everything, today in his mercy, God loves us sinners.

So God comes to us here in the church, the true Bethel, the house of God. And how awesome is this place! As Jacob realized, "This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven." Gathering here is entering the presence of the living God, the gate of heaven.

Yet so often, we approach God in his church as if we were asleep. Ignorant, unaware of our sin, just going through the motions. May God wake us from our spiritual slumber, to repent and see him! To hear his voice, and recognize this church as his mighty, awesome, eternal house.

If you've been coming to church automatically, without realizing that God is here, then wake up! Say with Jacob, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it." May God awaken us all to greater faith, to confess our sin and believe the good promises he offers here.

For today, in the church, God comes to sinners like us and showers us with all the blessings of Jacob. In Jacob's promised offspring, in Jesus Christ and his saving death, all the families of the earth are blessed. All of us. We are the nations of the earth, gathered here in the church to receive by faith all the good blessings and promises of God to Jacob.

And here, just as God promised to be with Jacob and keep him wherever he went, here in the church you enjoy that same promise. For Jesus has also said to you, "Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I with them." And he has said, "Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." What undeserved promises! Why do you love us so?

And here is also the connection to the gospel reading from Matthew 9, when Jesus healed the paralytic. Jesus, true God, loves sinners. God come to sinners and showers them with his blessings. God was there that day in the house, to bring his blessings to his people.

And remember the extra details of the story, details from Luke's version, how the paralyzed man's friends could not carry him into the house because of the crowd, so they lowered him down through a hole in the roof. The message of the story for you is this: Get into the house! Get into the house where Jesus is by any means possible. Come to his house. Seek Jesus here, the true God, in his church. For this is the awesome house of God, where you may come by faith to hear his word and receive all his blessings: forgiveness, life, and salvation.

Yet when the man's friends finally do get him to Jesus – when Jesus sees their faith, determined to get him into the house by any means possible, what does Jesus say? Probably not what they expected. Not, "Rise and walk." But, "Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven."

Maybe he was upset, certainly surprised. What? I came all this way to be healed; not forgiven! How useless! Yet forgiveness is not useless. Really, forgiveness is what we need the most, more than anything else. It's the greatest gift our God can give, here in his house. Whether we realize it or not, our worst enemy, worse than any other heartache or disease or suffering – our worst enemy is our own sin.

So put off your old self, your Old Adam, says Saint Paul. Put off your old sinful nature, and put on Christ, the new self, the new eternal Man, in his perfect righteousness and truth. Keep struggling daily against sin. And yet, no matter how hard we try, we cannot do it. We cannot rid ourselves of sin. Like the paralytic, we cannot cure ourselves.

Do not despair. Because your Jesus, who has called you and brought you into his house, he is also glad to forgive you here. This is the greatest good promise of God for you in the church. Christ died to save sinners, of whom I am the chief.

As an example, this week I visited our brother Tim in the hospital, and also our sister Jeanette in the nursing home. For both of them, their bodies are not currently strong enough to stand and walk. Like the paralytic in the story, they would love to walk again. And we pray that God would heal them, just as he healed so many of the paralyzed and lame.

But for now, when God comes to them and speaks to them, God does not say, "Rise and walk." What he says is, "Take heart, your sins are forgiven." He speaks these words through the pastor, commanded to speak in the stead and by the command of Jesus, to say to them – as he says to you – and as Jesus said to the paralytic that day, "Your sins are forgiven."

Absolution – what a precious gift! To all of human suffering, all trouble and sickness and discouragement, the real diagnosis is sin. Sin is the underlying enemy, death is the consequence. So there is only one perfect thing to say to sinners like us: "Take heart, your sins are forgiven." Forgiven because of the death of Jesus, because of the atoning sacrifice of God himself that turns away God's wrath. God himself has taken all the punishment we deserve for our selfishness and ignorance and greed, and he laid it on his own sinless Son, to suffer our punishment and give us his righteousness. This is what we need the most, more than anything else in all God's house.

And pastors have the authority to say this, to forgive sins. For Jesus has sent them, as he said in John 20, "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld." And Jesus has authority to give such authority to men, for all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to him. The Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.

So for Jesus, the living eternal God who holds in his hand the key of heaven, who has all authority to forgive you, it is a very easy thing for him to also say to you, and to Tim, and to Jeanette, and to each of us in all our troubles, "Rise, pick up your bed and go home."

In fact, that is exactly what Jesus will say to you and to all believers on the Last Day. "Rise, pick up your bed and come home." When our Creator speaks these words, even if our bodies are lying dead in the grave, we will instantly rise and obey.

So get into the house! Come here. For how awesome is this place! Here you receive the forgiveness of God, forgiveness in his absolution, and in his Supper, given and shed for you for the forgiveness of all your sins. And along with the forgiveness of sins in Jesus comes all his other blessings, all his promises to Jacob. Blessing and honor and life forever in his kingdom. For where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also everything else your God can give – life and salvation!

Yes, here in the house of God in the church, heaven is open to you. It's even better for you than it was for Jacob. Jacob only stood at the bottom of the ladder gazing upward. He couldn't go up. But for you, God has come down the ladder to you, come down as a man, to open the way to heaven by his death. And then he rose again to raise you up, to carry you up that ladder in his own arms, cleansed and forgiven, to stand in his glorious presence forever. Amen.

Now may the peace of God which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting. Amen.