



SEVENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Year B

Isaiah 43:18-19, 21-22, 24b-25

Psalms 41:2-3, 4-5, 13-14

2 Corinthians 1:18-22

Mark 2:1-12

Gathering

(An unlit candle and a green plant rest on a cloth-covered table in the gathering place.)

In this week's gospel Jesus heals a paralytic in body and soul. For those who have eyes to see, he shows himself as God, merciful and forgiving. Last week Jesus' healing powers inspired us to be healers too. How did you bring a healing touch to the people in your world this past week?

Prayer

(The candle is lit. Members are invited to rest in the presence of God. After a time of silence, the prayer continues as follows.)

Leader: Blessed is the one who has regard for the lowly and the poor;
in the day of misfortune the Lord will deliver him.
The Lord will keep and preserve him;
and make him blessed on earth,
and not give him over to the will of his enemies.

All: Lord, heal my soul, for I have sinned against you.

Leader: The LORD will help him on his sickbed,
he will take away all his ailment when he is ill.
Once I said, "O LORD, have pity on me;
heal me, though I have sinned against you."

All: Lord, heal my soul, for I have sinned against you.

Leader: But because of my integrity you sustain me
and let me stand before you forever.
Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel,
from all eternity. Amen. Amen.

All: Lord, heal my soul, for I have sinned against you.

Psalm 41:2-3, 4-5, 13-14

(Members join in singing, "Healer of Our Every Ill." The song may be found on the Internet.)

HEARING THE LORD'S GOSPEL

(The scriptures are proclaimed aloud with a pause after each reading. Following a pause after the proclamation of the gospel, the leader invites members to name a word or phrase from the gospel that stays with them, but without any additional comment. Some may repeat what another has already said.)

When this naming is complete, the leader passes out copies of the scriptures of the week as needed. The leader then poses these questions: "What draws you to this gospel?" "Where do you resist this gospel?" The community pauses for a time of silent reflection. After about a minute, the leader invites members to consider the Reflection and Questions for the week. After additional time for silent reflection, the leader invites members to re-arrange themselves in groups of three or four for sharing. The small groups move off so as not to intrude on one another.)

Reflection

This week's gospel portrait of Jesus' healing helps respond to the often

asked question as he made his way through Galilee, “Who is Jesus?” As a paralytic is dropped down from the roof, Jesus, seeing real faith, tells him, “Your sins are forgiven.” But having his sins forgiven is not why he came to Jesus. His friends want him healed; he wants to be able to walk! And, think the scribes, “He is blaspheming. Who but God alone can forgive sins?”

The narrative continues, as Jesus asks: “Which is easier to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or, ‘Rise, pick up your mat and walk?’” This is the test. Does this Jesus have words with real power? Jesus does not disappoint: “[T]hat you may know that the son of man has authority to forgive sins on earth...I say to you, rise, pick up your mat, and go home.” The story ends, in effect, with Jesus’ identity defined. Jesus healing the paralytic witnesses to his ability to bring about the forgiveness of sins...and only God forgives sins.

Jesus is God, merciful and forgiving. With the Father, in the Spirit, Jesus draws the circle of mercy and forgiveness wider than we might be inclined to imagine. What does a merciful and forgiving God mean for us today as people on all sides use God’s name in war? How often do we pray for our enemies? Certainly, our notion of mercy and forgiveness is not always God’s. St. Thomas Aquinas reminds us that our God is incomprehensible, that is, our creating, redeeming and life-giving God is so beyond us that we can never fully grasp the divine essence. Let us be careful, then, of how we assign to God our own ideas of mercy and forgiveness. Our God is always *doing something new* and we don’t always perceive it. God’s business is forgiveness and mercy.

Questions for Reflection and Conversation

- ◆ What have you come to know about God’s mercy, forgiveness?
- ◆ Who are the people who bring you to Jesus?
- ◆ To what lengths have you gone to bring someone to Jesus?
- ◆ When have you prayed for an *enemy*?
- ◆ As you have grown in faith, how has your understanding of who God changed?

HEARING THE GOSPEL’S LORD

(After about fifteen minutes of sharing in threes/fours, the leader re-gathers

the community. Once back together, members pause for a moment. The leader then poses these questions: “What do you hear Christ saying to us in hearing and sharing his word?” “What do you want to hold on to for yourself from this session?” “How are you/we being called to live in response to God’s word?” After a pause, the leader invites the community to conversation. When this sharing is complete, the community moves to a time of prayer.)

Response in Action Suggestions

- ◆ Set aside twenty minutes some day this week for reflection and prayer. Acknowledge before God those from whom you are alienated, those you may even regard as enemies. Pray for God’s mercy and forgiveness for yourself and for them.
- ◆ Offer respite care time to a family or friend who lives with a chronically ill person, someone who may be paralyzed physically, mentally or spiritually.
- ◆ Lent begins next week. Take some time this week to review how you have spent this season in the past. Make a plan for how you may spend this coming Lent as a time to deepen your relationship with God and others.

Prayer

(After a brief pause, the gospel of the week is re-proclaimed by a member of the community. Following the proclamation, the leader poses these questions to the members: “What does Christ in his Spirit say to you now?” “What do you say to him in response?” The community pauses for a full five, perhaps even seven, minutes of prayerful attention to God. A brief instrumental selection may be played during part of this time. After this time of silence, the leader invites members without additional conversation simply to mention a word or two, or a brief expression that captures what they hear Christ saying to them personally. The community receives this without additional comment.

Following this sharing, the prayer continues as follows.)

Leader: Jesus, you are the mercy of God made flesh among us. Our faith in your mercy encourages us to bring to you now our needs and concerns.

Faithful God, we are a people who long for healing and forgiveness. Teach us to forgive generously as you have so generously forgiven us. For this we pray...

All: God of mercy and forgiveness, hear our prayer.

Leader: Healer of Souls, help us to move beyond feelings of hurt, failure and guilt that keep us paralyzed and victims of the past. Open us always to the possibility of you doing something *new* in those tender places of our hearts. For this we pray...

All: God of mercy and forgiveness, hear our prayer.

Leader: Spirit of God, fill us with gratitude for the faith of family and friends who have brought us to you. For this we pray...

All: God of mercy and forgiveness, hear our prayer.

Leader: God of all that is good, open our eyes to see your mercy and forgiveness and our ears to hear your words of compassion that we may share more deeply in the life you have offered us. We ask this in Jesus name.

All: Amen.

(Members exchange a sign of peace.)