

Sermon preparation for the 19th Sunday after Trinity, that is October 18

Text: Mark 2:1-12

Please refer to my sermon preparation of the 17th Sunday after Trinity that is October 4, 2009 for my approach and style. You will see that my practical examples are neutral, as you need give dept by spelling out the relevant examples in your sermons. Crucial for all of us will be to stand with/ for those who are suffering under the stigma of HIV/ Aids.

Possible Theme: Bringing "sinners" to Christ

SUB THEMES:

1. The Cost
2. The Obstacles
3. The Reward

INTRODUCTION

I was asked during the week by a member of another denomination whether we (Lutherans) are evangelistically inclined, meaning whether we have tent outreaches etc. I answered in the negative, that it was a problematic venture and that it took more tedious effort than the once off preaching effort with the aim to convert. Fortunately, he was aware off the challenges of outreaches and left me off the hook. This text however challenged me to think more seriously about bringing people to Christ in the 21 century.

My theme then: Bringing "sinners" to Christ

1. THE COST

Brothers and Sisters,

Here the crucial question is whether I am prepared to bring people to Christ, or am I as judgmental as the teachers of the law towards Christ and this "sinner"?

Our text really showed me how I was *not* inclined and prepared to bring others/ "sinners" to Christ. The effort that was taken by these four men, the determination for a man useless to them, but more so, a despised man, a "sinful" man caused me to think about my own position and attitude towards people. When we consider the cost it seemed just too much of a burden to make all the necessary preparations to bring someone to Christ. All sorts of excuses will come up as to not to give our time and energy to this cause. I think empathy for the condition of this man, caused the helpers not to abandon him. They could have gone on their own merrily way to hear Jesus without anyone distracting them, but fortunately they opted against this. Likewise we need to pray God for compassion for people, irrespective of their usefulness to us, as well as others to support us, as a singular effort may not be successful. Group support was crucial here and likewise to us.

The restoration of the quality of life of people, which is only to be found in Jesus, must however be the foremost on our hearts.

2. THE OBSTACLES

As our text progressed the four helpers ran into obstacles, obstructions in their way. Human beings are blocking the way. How will they react to this? I guess they must have pleaded for a passage way, but to no avail. This man was condemned by his community and they will not give up their position to let him through. Jesus' words of absolution stem from the views held by the people concerning a retribution idea (the deed-consequence connection). The idea was held that blessings, prosperity, health, etc. follow the just or righteous for their good deeds whilst, punishment, calamity, sickness, curses, follows the evildoers for their foolishness.

This man must have been very sinful in order to be paralyzed for his deeds. Tired from the long haul, will the helpers abandon their efforts and mission and submit to the crowd or will perseverance kicks in when barriers appear? They double their efforts by finding a way through the roof. They remove the thatch and hardened mud on top of the crossbeams and let the man down.

In history we have heard many times that the behaviour of "Christians" are the barriers to people to accept Christ. They heard about Jesus Christ, are impressed by His life and causes, but the distorted witness of His followers cause people to turn away.

We need to seriously investigate our witness and attitude towards those less fortunate to us. We are so easily prone to condemn, to despise, to shut out of our churches, to condemn without realizing by *grace we are saved*, not our own goodness and righteousness.

3. THE REWARD

It was with gladness that four men saw a changed, restored person leaving the house. It was all worth it! All the energy taping efforts. They are tired, but happy, satisfied. Amazement filled everyone in the crowd. How can this be? This is beyond our comprehension. We could never have dreamt of this possibility! We never considered the possibility for healing, for a changed lifestyle.

I pray that we too can be change agents with the help of Jesus. That we can be partakers in the healing and restoration of people. I pray the Holy Spirit to change our perceptions of people, our judgmentalism, our condemnation and that He will inspire us into action. That He will give us the perseverance, the insight and wisdom to create breakthroughs and to allow us to experience the joy of changed lives.
Amen.