

Sermon for Christ the Rock Lutheran Church – January 31, 2021

MIRACLES TESTIFY THAT JESUS IS GOD

Text: Mark 2:1-12

How tall was Jesus? What color was his hair? How big was his nose? Jesus was about 5'2" tall, with long dark hair, a beard, and a rather large nose. We can be relatively sure of that from historical descriptions and ancient pictures. For I have just given you a description of the average Jewish male in Biblical times. And in appearance that is what Jesus was -- an ordinary-looking person. Isaiah tells us: "He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him" (Is 53:2). The usual movie image of Jesus as someone especially striking, handsome and usually taller than the others is simply not true according to the Bible. There was nothing special in his appearance to attract people to him, rather people were attracted by his teaching with authority and by the miraculous signs he used to back up his teaching. The teaching and the miracles proved that, outward appearances to the contrary, Jesus was no ordinary man but rather true God, come down from Heaven to live for a while among us.

Today we continue the theme of Epiphany season. We continue to focus on events in Jesus' life which give evidence that Jesus is God. Our sermon today: **MIRACLES TESTIFY**. We will look at **EVIDENCE OF JESUS' DIVINITY IN HIS HOME IN CAPERNAUM** and then at **CONFIRMATION OF HIS POWER TO FORGIVE**.

Jesus had come home to Capernaum. Very early in his three years of public preaching and teaching Jesus had moved from Nazareth to Capernaum, a small city on the shoreline of the Sea of Galilee in northern Palestine.

Word got out that Jesus was back home, and soon so many people had gathered that the house was packed. Those who came later craned their necks through the doors and windows of the house. There Jesus preached the Word of God to those who came. The people listened intently for they could tell that this was no ordinary prophet. Mark tells us "the people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law" (1:22). To those who heard him speak, the evidence was clear. No ordinary man could speak with such power, clarity or authority.

Four men came carrying a paralyzed man on a stretcher. "Excuse us, please. Step aside, please. We want to get our friend up to Jesus." They tried at each of the doors, but without success for everyone else wanted to get closer too. So the men went up on the flat roof, peeled back some of the roofing tiles, and lowered their friend by ropes tied to the corners of the cot. Dust must have showered down on Jesus as they did this -- and the racket must have disturbed Jesus' teaching -- not to mention the distraction of a body floating down in front of him.

Jesus didn't resent the interruption, however. In fact, he could tell what lay behind their actions. "Jesus saw their faith," Mark tells us. Ordinary men can't see faith, but Jesus was no ordinary man. The Bible tells us that "God knows those that are his." Jesus could see the hearts inside these men. He saw hearts that believed that Jesus could help.

Jesus saw something else. He saw what they really needed. Before they could say a word --- before they could ask, he gives them something even better than they had hoped for. "Son, your sins are forgiven" (5).

Some experts in Jewish religious law were troubled by what they had just heard. They realized that only God can forgive sins. And they were right. If what Jesus said was true about forgiving the paralyzed man, then Jesus was God. Otherwise he was a blasphemer – guilty of making a mockery of God by claiming divine prerogatives for himself. You see, the one who sinned against must do the forgiving. It's of little value, for example, for me to forgive you for arguing with your husband, wife or parents. If things are going to be peaceful on the homefront, your husband, wife or parent must forgive you for the disrespectful, angry or mean words you said. To a much greater degree, all our sins are acts of rebellion against God, and God alone can forgive us. The Pharisees and teachers of the law were correct in that.

"Jesus immediately knew that they were thinking this way" (8). Only God can read hearts. But here Jesus did it.

There was clear evidence of the divinity of Jesus there in Capernaum. His teaching with authority, his seeing their faith, his forgiving their sin, his knowing what they were thinking – all lead to one inescapable conclusion: Jesus is God.

The people were understandably skeptical, however. So Jesus gave them some additional evidence to confirm his divinity. Jesus gave **MIRACULOUS PROOF OF HIS POWER TO FORGIVE**.

"Which is easier to tell the paralyzed man, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, take your stretcher, and walk?'" (9) How would you answer Jesus' question? The correct answer is "NEITHER -- for to forgive sins and to heal a paralyzed man are both equally impossible to men and both are equally easy to God. God can do both; humans can do neither." Therefore, by what would follow, the people would receive clear testimony of Jesus' power to forgive sins.

So that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins... Jesus continued. He turned to the paralyzed man and said, "Get up, take your stretcher and go home" (11). Immediately the man got up and walked out in full view of them all. That settled it! The healing which their eyes had just seen verified the forgiveness which eyes cannot see.

The primary purpose of miracles throughout the Bible is to give testimony to the truthfulness and authority of what God says. Pharaoh said to Moses: "Why should I listen to your God and let his

people go?" So God confirmed his existence and authority by sending the ten plagues. Jesus came and proclaimed God's Word -- testifying to all that he, Jesus, is the long-promised Messiah who gives forgiveness and eternal life. The miracles Jesus performed confirmed those words Jesus spoke. After Jesus performed his first miracle, the Bible says: "This, the first of his miraculous signs, Jesus performed in Cana of Galilee. He thus revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him" (Jo 2:11). Later Jesus would send his followers to preach the Gospel with miraculous signs to back up the truthfulness of what they preach. At the end of John's Gospel, he stated clearly the purpose of the miracles this way: "Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (20:30-31).

Jesus did not come into this world to be a miracle-working healer. He didn't stand on some hilltop and shout out: "Everyone in Israel be healed of whatever ails you." The miracles are done one on one, and whenever the Bible gives the conversation which went on at the time of a miracle, you see that Jesus turns the conversation to believing in him as the Son of God come to save people from their sins. The incident we are studying today is a good example of that. The men who lowered their friend through the roof to Jesus had only one thing in mind. They wanted their friend's paralysis cured. We can imagine their thoughts when Jesus seemed to ignore the paralysis and instead forgave the man's sins. "Oh great, we go to all this bother, finding ropes, opening up the roof, lowered our friend carefully -- and all this Jesus does is say: 'Your sins are forgiven.' We've wasted our time." But Jesus turned the focus and the meaning of the miracle to the greater healing he came to bring. The people in Capernaum walked away from that house -- not just thinking about the healing, but thinking that the healing backed up Jesus' claims. It was evidence that Jesus was God and Savior as he said! Many came to believe in him as the Savior that day -- or were strengthened in the faith they already had.

The people had never seen anything like what they saw that day, but actually they hadn't seen anything yet. Jesus' Transfiguration when Peter, James and John saw Jesus' full glory -- Easter when Jesus rose victoriously from the grave -- Ascension Day when Jesus went visibly back into Heaven --- these miraculous testimonies still lay in the future. Really none of us have seen anything yet -- for Judgment Day lies ahead. On Judgment Day Jesus will return in his full glory to judge all people and give the believers eternal life. We ain't seen nothin' yet! Heaven and all its glory wait for us and all who put their trust in Jesus!

Today God continues to give miraculous proof of Jesus' saving power and evidence that Jesus Christ is true God and Savior of the world. God started his miraculous working in us with the miracle of Baptism. When you were baptized, God called you to faith. He put faith in many of us when we were little babies before we could understand a word in the Bible.

God gives proof of his saving power through the power of the Word -- for the Word of God miraculously changes hearts and lives. The preaching of the cross -- the message that Jesus died on the cross to pay for the sins of the entire world -- that message is foolishness to our natural

way of thinking. But it makes sense to the believers because God miraculously opens our understanding. The Word transforms sinful human beings and gives them a whole new outlook on life and death.

God gives testimony through the miracle of the Lord's Supper. God gives us the body and blood of Jesus -- they are really present there with the bread and wine. It's a miracle. We can't understand or explain it. But God says it, and that settles it. In the Sacrament of the Altar, God assures each of us -- personally one on one -- that Jesus died for us. "Here take Jesus' body. Drink his blood as proof that your sins are forgiven," God says.

It's a miracle how the power of God shows itself in the lives of his people everyday. It's a miracle how it shows in Christians who take a house and make it a home --- a cozy, happy, caring, loving place -- in Christians who make their marriage last a lifetime by diligently working at it every day, viewing their marriage vow as also a promise and commitment they have made to God. The miraculous power of God shows in Christians who forgive and forget. There is no end to the frictions and hurt feelings of life. If we dwell on them, we can ruin any relationship. Bosses have their bad days, customers can be irritable, the check-out person can be in a bad mood, the wife preoccupied or downright ornery, the husband blind to his wife's feelings or needs. Christians try to take a person's words or actions in the kindest possible way. The check-out person, for example, may be heavy-hearted because of a loved one who is suffering from covid. Christians forgive and try to forget -- remembering that God has so freely forgiven us. The miraculous power of God shows in Christians who love one another and sincerely want to help one another. Miraculous power shows when a Christian says to himself: "Self, I offer you as a living sacrifice to our God." The miraculous shows in the strength and calm Christians are given when called upon to face hardship or tragedy. God's power shows itself when Christians freely, gladly, and generously give money to support their congregation or to help someone in need.

Mark was the youngest of the New Testament writers. Very likely he wasn't even born until sometime after Jesus ascended. Mark writes with the enthusiasm and wide-eyed amazement of youth. Our text is just one example: "AT ONCE he got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all. This amazed everyone and they praised God, saying 'We have never seen anything like this!'" Earlier we had heard him say: "The people were amazed at Jesus' teaching because he taught them as one who had authority" (1:22). AMAZED -- it's a word Mark used again and again in his gospel. Mark was writing his gospel for Romans. As gentiles the Romans wouldn't be impressed by proofs based on the Old Testament prophecies. But they would be impressed by might and power, so Mark focuses his attention on Jesus' miracles, the powerful proofs which testify that Jesus is God.

We have just as much reason to be amazed at the amazing things God has done and continues to do among us. He is taking us, sinful, weak human beings, and making us children of God, empowered to glorify him and build his kingdom through our lives. It might have seemed as if Jesus was quite ordinary at 5'2" with dark hair, dark beard, and a Jewish nose, but all he said and

did prove that he is true God. He continues to prove his divine power as he takes ordinary sinners like you and me and turns us into the Children of God who live each day to his glory.