The text for the sermon this morning is written in the sixth verse of the ninth chapter of the Gospel according to St. Matthew: "Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house."

There is a wonderful reversal in today's Gospel lesson. – At the beginning, a man is brought to Jesus lying upon a bed. He cannot carry himself, much less the bed beneath him. Other people have to carry him. – By the end, the man gets up – and carries away the very thing that had been carrying him. – He comes to Christ helpless. – He leaves walking. – And between those two moments stands Jesus Christ.

St. Matthew tells us that some people bring this man to Jesus, "sick of the palsy, lying on a bed." We are told very little about him. We do not know how long he had been paralyzed, we do not know how it happened, and we do not even hear him speak. – But Jesus sees the faith of those who brought him and says, "Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee."

They brought a man who could not walk, and to everyone present the obvious problem was his paralysis. But Jesus sees more deeply than they do – He sees not only the condition of the man's body, but the need of his soul. And so before He tells him to rise, He says, "Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee."

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We should not conclude from this that his paralysis was necessarily caused by some particular sin; the Gospel does not say that, nor does Scripture teach that every illness is the result of personal sin.

But Christ sees the whole man. The crowd can see the body lying helplessly on the bed – Christ sees something deeper. And St. John Chrysostom makes an important point about what follows. Forgiveness, he says, is the greater of the two miracles here. The Healing of the body can be seen, while forgiveness cannot. And so Christ performs the visible miracle to demonstrate His authority to accomplish the greater, invisible one – to forgive sins.

That is why Jesus asks the scribes, "Whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and walk?" The scribes have already decided that Jesus is blaspheming because only God can forgive sins – and on that point they are right. The question is whether they will recognize who is standing before them. – And so Jesus says, "But that ye may know that the Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive sins," and then He turns to the paralytic and says, "Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house."

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And the man arises. The bed that had carried him into the presence of Christ is now under his arm as he walks home. There is an image of the Christian life in that – because we also come to Christ with things that we cannot repair by ourselves. – We cannot forgive our own sins, we cannot give ourselves divine life, and we cannot make ourselves holy simply by deciding that from now on we will try harder.

The Collect this morning says it very plainly: "O God, forasmuch as without thee we are not able to please thee." That may not be a particularly flattering assessment of human self-sufficiency, but it is an honest one. Without God, we cannot become what God created us to be. – The paralytic could not simply decide to get up – if trying harder were enough, he would hardly have needed people to carry him to Jesus. Christ had to do for him what he could not do for himself. – And that is grace.

But grace does not leave him lying on the bed. Jesus does not say, "Your sins are forgiven – remain exactly where you are." He says, "Arise." – Grace does not simply comfort us where we have fallen – grace raises us so that we can begin to walk differently.

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And that is exactly what St. Paul is talking about in today's Epistle. He tells the Ephesians, "Put off concerning the former conversation the old man…and be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and that ye put on the new man." The word conversation here means our manner of life – how we live. St. Paul is saying that the Christian who has received grace is not meant simply to continue living exactly as before. Something has to change.

And St. Paul is wonderfully practical about what that change looks like. Put away lying – and speak truth. If you have stolen, steal no more – work honestly instead, and have something to give to someone in need. Do not let corrupt speech come out of your mouth – speak what is good and helpful. Put away bitterness, wrath, anger, and malice – and instead "be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you."

Notice the pattern. St. Paul does not merely say, "Stop doing bad things." He keeps replacing the old way with something new – lying becomes truth, taking becomes giving, corrupt speech becomes words that build up, bitterness becomes kindness, and holding another person's sins against him becomes forgiveness. – Christian repentance does not simply leave an empty space where

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a sin used to be – grace begins putting something better in its place.

St. John Chrysostom notices this very thing. After speaking generally about the "old man," he says St. Paul begins to describe him in detail, because these things are learned more clearly when we see them in particular. And when he reaches the end of the passage, he points out that it is not enough merely to remove what is wrong – anger must give way to kindness, bitterness to tender-heartedness, malice to forgiveness. Otherwise, as he puts it, an empty field will simply grow weeds again. – –

It is easy to speak generally about becoming a "new man." – It becomes much more challenging when that means controlling our anger – telling the truth when a lie would be easier – changing the way we speak – becoming more generous – or forgiving someone who has hurt us. – That is where the new life begins to become visible.

And perhaps that helps us understand why the command in the Gospel is not merely "Arise." Jesus continues, "Take up thy bed, and go unto thine house." Go home – go back into ordinary life. The miracle is not meant to remain an extraordinary moment in one room with Jesus. The man must now walk home and live.

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That is true for us as well. We come here to receive grace – and then we go home. We receive absolution, and then we go back to the person we have been struggling to forgive. – We hear the Word of God, and then we return to conversations in which we must decide whether to speak truthfully and charitably. – We receive the Body and Blood of Christ, and then we go back into homes, workplaces, families, friendships, frustrations, temptations, and responsibilities. The Christian life is lived there.

The Epistle is very clear that receiving grace should eventually change how we behave when we leave the church building. And that brings us again to the Collect: "Mercifully grant that thy Holy Spirit may in all things direct and rule our hearts." Not merely here in church – in all things. That is a rather serious prayer, because we are asking the Holy Ghost to rule the heart from which our words, choices, tempers, desires, and habits come. Outward change without inward renewal never goes very deep.

St. Paul says, "Be renewed in the spirit of your mind." Christ does not merely want to make us look more respectable – He intends to make us new. We can know a great deal about the Faith and still have much to learn. We can read our Bibles, know what they say – even quote chapter and verse – and yet fail to let those words correct us. – It is possible to know Scripture well enough to

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quote it and still not let Scripture read us. – We may have been Christians for many years, pray regularly, receive the Sacraments, and serve the Church – and yet discover areas of our lives that have not been fully surrendered to Christ.

And sometimes that means that the very things which once seemed to control us no longer have the same power. Perhaps that is another way to look at the bed in today's Gospel. – At the beginning, the man is being carried by it – at the end, he carries it. – What once represented his helplessness has become a visible sign that Christ has changed his life.

There are things in our lives that can seem to carry us along almost helplessly – old habits, resentment, anger, fear, or sins we have repeated so often that we begin to assume they are simply part of who we are. Christ does not tell us that those things do not matter. He forgives, He heals, He gives grace – and then He says, "Arise."

That does not mean we will never struggle again. Our growth as Christians is ordinarily much slower than the physical miracle in today's Gospel. Some habits require long repentance, some wounds take time to heal, and some temptations must be resisted again and again. But we should never confuse struggle

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with hopelessness. We are not left to change ourselves by our own strength – the same Collect that admits "without thee we are not able to please thee" immediately asks that the Holy Ghost direct and rule our hearts. God supplies what we lack – and then He calls us to walk in what He gives.

So perhaps the Gospel leaves us with two questions this morning: What do I need Christ to do for me that I cannot do for myself? – *and* – Having received His grace, where is Christ telling me to arise and walk differently? – Perhaps there is something to put off and something new to put on – a resentment to replace with forgiveness – a dishonest habit with truth – a bitter word with one that gives grace – a selfish habit with generosity.

We come to Christ because we cannot heal ourselves – but we do not come so that we may remain forever where He found us. – The paralytic man came in being carried, and he went home walking – carrying with him the very thing that once carried him.

May the Holy Ghost so direct and rule our hearts that the grace we receive from Christ may become visible in the lives we live when He says to us, "Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house."

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