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## GOSPEL FOR THE NINETEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

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*Matthew 9:1–8*

*And getting into a boat He crossed over and came to His own city. And behold, some people brought to Him a paralytic, lying on a bed. And when Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, “Take heart, My son; your sins are forgiven.” And behold, some of the scribes said to themselves, “This man is blaspheming.” But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, “Why do you think evil in your hearts? For which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Rise and walk’? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”—He then said to the paralytic—“Rise, pick up your bed and go home.” And he rose and went home. When the crowds saw it, they were afraid, and they glorified God, who had given such authority to men.*

1. The sum of this Gospel reading is the great, high article of faith which is called “the forgiveness of sins.” If it is correctly understood, it produces a genuine Christian and gives eternal life. Therefore, it is necessary that we treat this article with all diligence and without ceasing in Christendom, so that we learn to understand it clearly and distinctly. This is the only, highest, and most difficult skill of Christians, in which we have enough to learn as long as we live here, so that no one needs to see anything new, higher, or better.

2. However, in order to understand it correctly, we must very properly know how to distinguish the two governances or two kinds of righteousness. One of these God has arranged here on earth and put into the Second Table of the Ten Commandments [Exod. 20:12–17]. This is called a worldly or human righteousness and is useful as we live here on earth among one another and employ the goods God has given to us. He also wants this life to be conducted and passed very peacefully, quietly, and harmoniously, so that each one does what is entrusted to him, and no one meddles in another's office, goods, or person [cf. 1 Pet. 4:15]. This is why He has also attached a blessing to it and said, “Whoever does them will live in them” [Lev. 18:5], that is, “Whoever is righteous on earth and before the world should also benefit from it, so that it goes well with him and he lives long.”

3. On the other hand, if someone does not want to do this, He has ordained the sword, the gallows, the wheel, fire, water, etc., with which He commands that those who do not want to be righteous are to be restrained and checked. Where this does not happen, but a whole country becomes wicked and perverse, so that the executioner cannot restrain it, then God sends pestilence, famine, war, or other terrible afflictions, with which He overturns and destroys the country, as happened to the Jews, the Greeks, the Romans, and others. Thus we see that in short He wants people to retain and use this righteousness, and He gives benefits enough to it; but if not, then He will take everything back and destroy them.

4. Briefly, this is the meaning and the whole substance of this righteousness on earth. Included in this further is that we urge and admonish the people so that everyone hurries and takes pains to do this with desire and love, so that he does not need to be urged to it with force and punishment. The admonition, however, consists of applying God's Commandments and mandate to each estate<sup>1</sup> on earth, as He has ordered and issued them. We should look at these, esteem them, and from them derive the desire gladly to do from the heart what is proper for each one in his estate. For example, when He says, "You shall honor father and mother" [Exod. 20:12], then here every child, servant, maid, subject, etc., should receive these words with joy, have no higher regard for any treasure on earth, and imagine that when he does this, he would be halfway, if not completely, in paradise. Then his heart can conclude without a doubt: "Now I know that this work, life, or estate is proper and good, pleasing to God from the heart. I have His words and command as a sure testimony which cannot lie or wrong me."

5. Let this not be the least grace on earth: when you come to the point that this is resolute in your heart and your conscience can take its stand and rest on it. We should thank the dear Gospel alone for this, cherish it, and give it all honor, even if we should have no other benefit and fruit from it than that our conscience is assured and made certain about how we are to live and be with God.

How we previously lay in error and blindness, when not even a spark of this teaching had enlightened us! We were led in the devil's name into whatever any lying preacher had dreamed. We sought so many works, ran here and there, applied and poured out our sweat, money, and property. Here we endowed Masses and altars; there, monasteries and brotherhoods.<sup>2</sup> Everyone was groping for how he could be certain that he was serving God. No one succeeded, but all remained in darkness. There was no God who had said, "This is pleasing to Me; this I have commanded," etc. Yes, our blind leaders

1 See sermon for the Twelfth Sunday after Trinity on Mark 7:31-37, fn. 3.

2 See sermon for Easter Sunday on Mark 16:1-8, fn. 5.

[cf. Matt. 15:14] did nothing else than put God's Word out of sight, tear away genuine works, and in place of them set up others in every corner. In addition, the estates which He had set up were overthrown and despised, just as if He did not know how to arrange things better than we do.

6. Therefore, we must not neglect always to keep the Word of God in mind that imposes on us no especially difficult work, but points at just that estate in which we live, so that we seek nothing else but remain in it with a cheerful conscience, knowing that more is accomplished through such work, even if it were the very least housework, than if someone had endowed all monasteries and maintained all orders. We have previously been deceived by the fine appearance and ostentation of works such as cowls, tonsures, hair shirts, fasts, vigils, sad faces, hanging the head, and going barefoot.

It is our folly that we calculate value according to the appearance of the work, and because it does not glitter as something special, we do not value it. We fools do not look at the fact that God has fastened and bound this precious treasure—namely, His Word—just to such common works when (as was said) in His command and order He includes obedience to parents and the works which occur in the external, domestic, or civil affairs. He wants these things accepted, as if He Himself had appeared from heaven. What would you do if Christ Himself with all the angels visibly descended and commanded you in your home to sweep the house or wash the dishes? How happy you would be! You would not know how to act for joy—not because of the work, but because you would know that you were serving the One who is greater than heaven and earth.

7. If only we would consider this and through the Word go and look beyond ourselves to see that it is not a man but God in heaven who demands and commands these things, then we could jump and run at doing these common works, as people regard them, rather than others, with utmost faithfulness and diligence. This, however, does not happen, because we separate the works from the Word and do not want to look at or pay attention to God's command. We go about as blind, sleepy people and think everything depends on doing the works. Because we despise them, and seek and gape at other things, we become lazy and reluctant. We do nothing with love, faithfulness, and obedience. We have no scruples about not doing these things. And we act faithlessly, harmfully, or offensively to our neighbor, by which we accumulate for ourselves all afflictions, wrath, and misfortune.

8. Now, one part of our teaching is to promote this external righteousness both with admonition and threatening, and not to let it be scorned. Whoever despises this has despised God and His Word.

9. Therefore, each one should look for himself at what he is or what he has to do and what God wants from him, whether it is to rule, command,

and give orders or, on the other hand, to obey, serve, work, etc. For God's sake he is to attend to his office with all faithfulness and be certain that God thinks more highly of this than if he had the work and holiness of all monks, who never yet have attained this external righteousness. They cannot boast as much about all their ways and works as can a young child or a servant girl who at God's command does the work of a child or a maid.

What a happy world we would have if people believed this and everyone remained for himself in his office, with his eyes always on God's will and command. Then it would have to snow from heaven with all kinds of blessings and benefits. Instead of that, we now have to have so many afflictions and sorrows, which we desire and deserve.

10. Beyond this external righteousness there is now another, which does not belong to this temporal life on earth but which has value only before God. It leads and preserves us in the life to come after this one. The former righteousness consists of works which this life requires to be done among people toward superiors, inferiors, and neighbors. It has its reward here on earth and ends with this life. Whoever does not observe it does not remain in this life. The latter, however, rises and soars beyond everything which is on earth and has nothing to do with works. How can it have works when everything which the body can do and is called "work" is already included in the other righteousness?

This is now what people call "God's grace" or "the forgiveness of sins," about which Christ speaks in this and all Gospels. It is not an earthly but a heavenly righteousness, not our activity and ability but God's work and gift. The former, human righteousness can certainly avoid punishment and the executioner and enjoy temporal benefits, but not arrive at the point of attaining God's grace and the forgiveness of sins. Therefore, even though we have the former, we must still have a much higher one which can stand before God, deliver us from sin and a bad conscience, and take us out of death into eternal life.

11. This is also the one part, or article and teaching, by which we become and are called Christians and which separates and divides us from all other saints on earth. They all have a different basis and different ways for their holiness, special practices, and strict life, etc., or even for the works in their estates and offices which are confirmed by God's Word, which are still much higher and better than monastic, self-chosen spirituality. They even form a holy estate so that they are called righteous, as if they did what they should and everyone had to praise them. Not one of them, however, is a Christian, unless he lays hold of this article with faith and knows that he is in the kingdom of grace where Christ has taken him under His wings [cf. Matt. 23:37] and without ceasing gives him the forgiveness of sins. Whoever seeks something

different or wants to deal differently with God should know that he is not a Christian, but is rejected and condemned by God.

12. This is why skill and understanding are required to grasp and keep this righteousness and carefully to distinguish it in our consciences before God from that external righteousness. This is, as has been said, the skill and wisdom of Christians, but it is so high and great that even all the dear apostles could not say enough about it. Nevertheless, it experiences the grievous affliction that people finish learning no skill as quickly as this one.

No preaching is greater than that about grace and the forgiveness of sins; yet we are such wicked people that when anyone has heard or read it once, he knows it and is immediately a master and a doctor. Then he seeks something higher, as if he had accomplished everything, and produces new factions and divisions.

13. I myself have now been learning this for so many years and worked at it with all diligence (more than any of those who imagine that they know it) in preaching, writing, reading, etc. Yet I cannot brag about any mastery but must be happy that I remain a student with those who are just beginning to learn. This is why I must admonish and warn all who want to be Christians, both teachers and students, to be on their guard against this shameful delusion and boredom and to know that this is the highest and most difficult skill that can be found on earth. Even St. Paul has to confess and say that it is "an inexpressible gift" [2 Cor. 9:15]; that is, how high and precious it is in itself cannot be impressed on people with words.

14. The cause of this is that reason cannot get beyond its external righteousness in works, nor can it comprehend the righteousness of faith, but the higher and more intelligent it is, the more it tries to cling to works and rely on them. It cannot permit anyone in temptation and need, struck by his conscience, not to grasp at works on which he might rest and stand. Then we seek and enumerate many good works, which we want to do or have done. When we do not find any, then the heart begins to be afraid and doubt. This adheres so firmly that even those who have faith and know grace or the forgiveness of sins can [only] work themselves out of it with all effort and labor and must daily fight against it. In short, it is entirely beyond human intellect and understanding, skill and ability, to rise above this earthly righteousness and to step into this article. Even though we hear much about it and agree with it, nevertheless the old delusion and inborn filth, which tries to bring its own works before God and make them the basis of salvation, always remains. This is the experience, I say, of those who are Christians and fight against it. The other sophists and untested spirits are completely drowned in it.

15. Therefore, this teaching should be grasped in such a way that we are completely convinced that our righteousness before God is the forgiveness of

sins. Then we must work our way out of ourselves and rise above our reason, which disputes with us and points us to both sin and good works. We must rise so high that we look at neither sin nor good works, but rely on and sink ourselves into this article, so that we see and know nothing else. Thus we must set grace or forgiveness not only against sin but also against good works and exclude all human righteousness and holiness. Thus man is divided into these two governances: Outwardly in this life he is to be righteous, do good works, etc. If, however, he goes beyond this life to deal with God, then he is to know that neither his sin nor his righteousness has any value. Even though he senses sin, which oppresses his conscience, and the Law demands good works, he should neither listen nor look at them, but answer boldly: "If I have sin, Christ has forgiveness. Yes, I sit on the throne which sin cannot reach."

16. We should regard Christ's kingdom as a beautiful, large arch or vault over us everywhere, which covers and protects us from God's wrath—yes, a great, wide heaven where nothing but grace and forgiveness shine and fill the world and all things. On the other hand, all sin is scarcely a spark compared with the great, wide sea. Even if it oppresses us, it cannot harm us, but must dwindle away and vanish before grace. Whoever knows this can certainly be called a master. We, however, must all submit and not be ashamed to learn this as long as we live.

17. If our nature knows about one of our sins, it can make out of it a burden as heavy as heaven. Then the devil blows on it and out of a spark makes a fire which fills heaven and earth. Here the page must be turned, and we must confidently conclude: No matter how large and grave the sin is, this article is much higher, longer, and larger. No man has spoken or established this article by his own wisdom. The one who did that is the one who grasps and holds heaven and earth with three fingers (as the prophet Isaiah [40:12] says). My sin and righteousness must remain here below on earth, as far as my life and doing are concerned. Above, however, I have another treasure, greater than either of these, where Christ sits and holds me in His arms, covers me with His wings, and overshadows me with nothing but grace [cf. Matt. 23:37].

18. You say: "How can this be, since I daily sense sin, and my conscience condemns me and reminds me of God's wrath?" I answer: This is why I say that we should learn that Christian righteousness is nothing else which can be named or conceived except only the forgiveness of sins, that is, a kingdom or governance which deals only with sin and with superabundant grace which takes away all wrath.

It is called the forgiveness of sins because we are genuine sinners before God—yes, there is nothing but sin in us, even if we have all human righteousness. Where He speaks about sins, there must be truly big sins there.

So also forgiveness is not a joke, but very serious. Therefore, when you look at this article, you have both: sin takes away all your holiness, no matter how righteous you are on earth; on the other hand, forgiveness cancels all sin and wrath, so that neither can your sin push you into hell nor your righteousness lift you into heaven.

19. Therefore, when the devil troubles your conscience, makes your heart despondent, and says, "You yourself taught that people should be righteous," then answer confidently and say: "Yes, indeed, I have known for a long time that I am a sinner, for this article called 'the forgiveness of sins' taught me this long ago. I want to be righteous and do as much as I can before the world. However, before God I want to be a sinner and be called nothing else, so that this article remains true." Otherwise it would not be forgiveness or grace, but it would have to be called a crown of righteousness and of my merit. Therefore, even though I sense nothing other than many and great sins, yet they are no longer sins, for I have a precious antidote and medicine which takes away the power and poison of sin and kills it, namely, the word "forgiveness." Before it, sin vanishes like stubble before fire. Otherwise no works, suffering, or torment helps against even the least sin. Apart from forgiveness, there is and remains nothing but sin, which condemns us.

20. Therefore, you should boldly and fully confess only this article and conclude: Before the world I can be righteous and do everything I should, but before God it is nothing but sin because of this article. Therefore, I am indeed a sinner, but the kind of sinner who now has forgiveness and sits on the throne where only grace rules, as Psalm 116 [:5] says. Otherwise I would be a sinner like Judas, who saw only his sin and no forgiveness [cf. Matt. 27:3–5]. Christians, however, no matter how much sin they see in themselves, see even higher and greater grace over and around them, given and poured out on them in the Word.

21. So now learn to magnify this article and spread it out as far as Christ reaches and rules, so that you can exalt it high and far above everything in heaven and on earth. Just as the Word soars over everything, so also faith, which grasps the Word in the heart and clings to it, must go over sin, conscience, death, and the devil.

22. Now consider what kind of a man a Christian is, who is called "lord over the devil and death" and before whom all sin is like a dry leaf. Here test yourself, as much as you can, about whether this is such a common and easy skill as the inexperienced spirits think. If you knew and believed it, then all misfortune, death, and the devil would be nothing. However, you are still letting sin bite you and are frightened and afraid of death, hell, and God's judgment. Because of this, humble yourself, give honor to the Word, and confess that you have never yet understood this.

In short, let everyone examine his own bosom. He will find there a false Christian who imagines that he knows everything before he has learned the first letters. The words are certainly heard, read, and quickly retained, but to put it into practice and reality, so that it lives in us and the conscience relies and depends on it, is not something people can do. Therefore, I tell and admonish those who want to be Christians always to be occupied with it, chew it, emphasize it, and work at it so that we may at least get a taste of it and, as James 1 [:18] says, become a beginning or "firstfruits of His creatures." In this life we will not finish getting a perfect understanding, because the dear apostles, who were full of the Spirit and of faith, did not advance further.

23. So that is the first point, namely, what Christian righteousness is and of what it consists. Now, if you ask further: "Where does it come from, or how is it brought about or acquired?" then the answer is: "It comes because Jesus Christ, God's Son, came from heaven and became man, suffered, and died for our sins." This is the cause, the means, and the treasure through which and because of which the forgiveness of sins and God's grace were given to us. This treasure does not come to us without means or merit. However, because we all were born in sin as God's enemies, we have deserved nothing but eternal wrath and hell, so that everything we are and of which we are capable is condemned, and there is no relief or way out of it. Sin is so grave that no creature can wipe it out, and wrath is so great that no one can quiet or appease it. This is why another man must take our place, namely, Jesus Christ, God and man, and through His suffering and death give satisfaction and pay for sins. This is the expenditure which has been applied to us, by which sin and God's wrath have been wiped out and taken away. By it the Father has been appeased and has become our Friend.

24. Only Christians know and believe this, and this divides them from every other belief and worship on earth. Jews, Turks, false Christians, and work-saints also boast that God is merciful. There is no one on earth who cannot talk about God's grace, and yet all of them fail to obtain any grace or the forgiveness of sins. This means that they do not know how to obtain it; that is, they do not have the treasure in which it lies and from which it flows. They go on in their blindness and want to accomplish things with their activity, strict life, and their own holiness, by which they only make God's wrath and disfavor more severe.

25. Therefore, it is necessary that we learn truly to find this treasure and to seek forgiveness where it is to be sought, that is, that we get to know, grasp, and firmly keep the Lord Jesus Christ. It is determined that without and apart from Christ no one will come before God, find grace, or obtain forgiveness for even the least sin. Because you are and remain a sinner without ceasing,

your conscience is there condemning you and reminding you of God's wrath and punishment, so that you cannot see any grace.

However, you will not find in your bosom (as was said) anything with which you can pay for this forgiveness nor muster any reason for God to look at you and wipe the slate clean. When, however, you lay hold of Christ as the one who has taken your place, taken your sin onto Himself, and given Himself to be your own with all His merits and benefits, then no sin can do anything against you. I am a sinner, but He is holy, the Lord over sin, death, the devil, and hell, so that no sin can harm me because He has been given to me as my righteousness and blessedness.

26. Thus we certainly have nothing but pure grace and the forgiveness of all sins, but it must be sought and found nowhere except only through and in the one Christ. Now, whoever comes before God with any works which He is supposed to look at and which are supposed to be worth something for obtaining grace will stumble and bump his head—yes, instead of grace [he will] burden himself with nothing but wrath. So you see that all other means and ways are condemned as the devil's teaching, through which people are led astray and pointed to their own works or to the holiness and merits of others, such as the example of the saints who lived in strict orders, suffered much, and did penance for a long time, etc., or those who comforted and admonished people in peril of death to suffer death willingly for their sins.<sup>3</sup> It is denying the Lord Christ—yes, insulting and slandering Him—when anyone dares to oppose sin with anything else or even himself to do penance for sin, as if Christ's blood were not worth as much as our repentance and satisfaction or as if His blood were insufficient to blot out all sin on earth.

27. Therefore, if you want to get free from sin, then stop seeking to bring your works and satisfaction before God; rather, crawl under and into Christ as the one who has taken your sin away from you and put it on Himself. You need not contend with it or have anything to do with it. "He is the Lamb of God," says John [the Baptist], "who bears the world's sin" [John 1:29]. "There is no other name under heaven," as Peter says (Acts 4 [:12]), "in which we can be saved." We are called Christians because we have Him with all His merit and benefits, not because of our deeds and works, which certainly can make a holy Carthusian, Franciscan, or Augustinian monk, who is called "obedient" and "one who fasts" but can never produce a Christian.<sup>4</sup> This is the second point which belongs to the preaching of this article.

28. The third point is how and by what means this righteousness is brought home to us, so that we receive the treasure earned by Christ. Here we should also point out that we should proceed carefully and not make the

3 See sermon for Second Sunday after Easter on John 10:11–16, paragraph 26.

4 See sermon for Easter Sunday on Mark 16:1–8, fn. 11.

mistake of some heretics in the past and of many erroneous spirits still, who asserted and thought that God should do something special with them: that through a special light and a secret revelation He should deal with each one inwardly in the heart and give him the Holy Spirit, as if we did not need any letters, writings, or external preaching. Therefore, we should know that God has so ordered that no one shall come to the knowledge of Christ or receive the forgiveness earned by Him or the Holy Spirit without external, public means. Rather, He has included this treasure in the oral Word or preaching office and does not want this carried out in a corner or secretly in the heart, but wants it to be publicly proclaimed and administered among the people, as Christ commands: "Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature," etc. [Mark 16:15].

29. He does this so that we may be certain how and where we must seek and expect this grace, so that things would happen in the same way and order in Christendom, and no one would undertake on his own to follow his own thoughts, lest he deceive himself and others, which otherwise would certainly happen. Because we cannot look into anyone's heart, everyone could boast about the Holy Spirit and proclaim that his own thoughts were a spiritual revelation taught and inspired by God in a special way, with the result that no one could know whom or what to believe.

30. Thus this point—namely, the external Word or preaching—belongs in Christendom as a pipe or means through which we obtain the forgiveness of sins or Christian righteousness, through which Christ and His grace are revealed and brought to us or put in our lap, without which no one could ever become certain of the treasure. How could we know, or how could it ever come into any man's heart, that Christ, God's Son, came from heaven for our sake, died for us, rose from the dead, acquired the forgiveness of sins and eternal life, and gave it to us, if He did not have it proclaimed and preached publicly? Even though He earned the treasure for us through His suffering and death, no one could have obtained or received it, if He had not had it offered and brought home to us through the Word. Everything He has expended and done would have been in vain and nothing else than a large, precious treasure buried in the earth, since no one would know to seek it or to make use of it.

31. This is why I have always taught that first, and above all things, the oral Word must be present and taken in by the ears if the Holy Spirit, who enlightens the heart with and through the Word and who works faith, is to enter the heart. Thus faith does not come or endure except through hearing the external preaching of the Gospel, through which it both begins and grows or is strengthened [cf. Rom. 10:17]. Accordingly, we should by no means despise it, but honor it, gladly be occupied with it, and without ceasing

emphasize and work at it, which never happens without fruit. Moreover, it can never be sufficiently understood and learned. Everyone should be on his guard against the shameful spirits who scorn it as if it were unnecessary or not useful for faith, or who have quickly finished learning it and become bored with it, until they finally fall away and retain nothing of faith and Christ.

32. Here you have everything which belongs to this article about Christian righteousness, which consists of the forgiveness of sins given to us through Christ and received with faith through and in the Word, purely and solely without any of our works. Nevertheless, this does not happen in such a way that a Christian should not and must not do good works. Rather, we are not to mix and entwine works into the teaching of faith and drape them with the shameful delusion that they can do something for righteousness before God. In that way, we would be defiling and destroying both works and the teaching of faith. Everything depends on keeping this article pure and clean, separated from all our deeds. Accordingly, however, when we have this righteousness, then works should follow and continue here on earth, where they produce and maintain worldly righteousness. Thus both happen correctly, but each particularly in its place and rank: the former before God in faith above and before all works; the latter in works of love to our neighbor, as we have sufficiently said above and have always taught.

## THE POWER TO FORGIVE SINS ON EARTH

[33.] The Pharisees certainly knew that forgiving sins is God's work and belongs to Him alone. For this reason they regarded Christ as a blasphemer, who as a man tried to forgive sins [Matt. 9:3]. Sins are forgiven in two ways: First, sin is driven out of the heart and grace is poured in; only God does this. Second, the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed; one man does this to another. Christ, however, does both: He puts the Spirit into the heart and outwardly proclaims it with words. This is a proclamation and public preaching of the inward forgiveness.

[34.] All people who are Christians and baptized have this power. In this way they praise Christ, and the words are put into their mouths, so that they can say, whenever they want and as often as it is necessary: "Look, dear man! God offers you His grace and forgives all your sins. Be comforted, your sins have been forgiven. Only believe it and you surely have it." This sound should not cease among Christians until the Last Day: "Your sins have been forgiven. Be cheerful and comforted!" A Christian always has such words in his mouth and publicly speaks the words in which sins are forgiven. Thus in this way a Christian has the power to forgive sins.

[35.] Accordingly, when I say to you: "Your sins have been forgiven," then regard it as just as certain as if God had said it to you Himself. Who

would try to do this if Christ Himself had not descended, had not put it in my mouth and said that we should forgive sins to one another? He said in John [20:22–23]: “Receive the Holy Spirit. Whosoever sins you remit, they are remitted; and whosoever you retain, they are retained.” In another place He said: “If two among you agree on what they want to ask for, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. For if two or three are gathered in My name, I am there among them” [Matt. 18:19–20]. The Word is what does it; it penetrates [cf. Heb. 4:12].

[36.] Now, if there were no one on earth who forgave sins, but there were only Law and works, how timid and miserable a poor distressed conscience would be! But now, when God has filled everyone’s mouth so that he can say to another: “Your sins are forgiven,” no matter where you are, the golden year<sup>5</sup> has begun. Our confidence and boast against sin is that I can say to my brother, who is stuck in the anguish and danger of sin: “Be cheerful and comforted, my brother, because your sins have been forgiven. Even though I cannot give you the Holy Spirit and faith, I can nevertheless proclaim this to you. If you believe it, you have it.” Now, whoever receives this praises and glorifies God, just as they also do here in the Gospel reading [Matt. 9:8]. This means that God has given to human beings the authority to forgive sins, and this means increasing the kingdom of Christ and comforting and supporting the conscience. We now do this through the Word. God grant that we so take hold of it too.

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5 See sermon for Thirteenth Sunday after Trinity, fn. 1.