

[THE WOMAN WITH THE FLOW OF BLOOD & JAIRUS'S DAUGHTER. READ THIS SERMON! IN IT LUTHER BEAUTIFULLY EXPLAINS WHAT THE GOSPEL, CHRIST, AND THE CHRISTIAN ARE. IT IS A REFORMATION CLASSIC!]

Sermon for the Twenty-Fourth Sunday after Trinity; Matthew 9:18-26

A Sermon by Martin Luther; taken from his Church Postil.

1. Dear friends, you know that the Gospel is nothing else than a sermon about one person who is called Christ. And although there are many other books written here and there, and many sermons preached by many different persons, both about the heathen and the Christians, yea, also about the mother of God, St. Peter, angels and many of the saints; yet they are not Gospels, for this alone is the true Gospel which sets before us Christ, and teaches the good things we may hope from him.

2. Of course there is also at times something in the Gospel on John the Baptist, Mary and the Apostles, but this is not properly the Gospel, for they are taken into consideration so as more perfectly to indicate whence Christ came and what his office is. So Luke relates the history of John the Baptist from the beginning, his conception and birth; and that of the Virgin Mary, all which is written not for their sake, but only for the sake of the one person Christ, so that everything written in the Gospel concerns this person Christ alone. In St. Paul's Epistles there is nothing written about the saints, all there is about Christ alone. The Evangelists describe what miracles and wonders Christ performed; but they write of no work that John or Mary did; but only what Christ did, how he helped the people in body and soul, and how the people clung to him.

3. For God has decreed it is his will that all should cling to the one man Christ, to hope in him and hold fast to him if they would be saved. Thus they know nothing of any one aside from Christ, who alone has been presented unto us by God as our mercy-seat, as St. Paul writes, Rom. 3, 25. Hitherto one has clung to this saint, another to that, one has had Mary, another Saint Barbara, and there have been manifold sects and orders. But no one cared anything for Christ except for the name. We have had many mediators, all of whom we abandoned and held only to Christ. Therefore St. Paul says in Rom. 1, 2, that the Gospel was promised by God through the prophets concerning his Son. And he insists upon it so very strongly, that nothing avails in the Gospel except the one only person, Jesus Christ. He who knows this may well thank God, that he knows where to place his comfort, help and confidence, and he will then despise and cast away all sermons about other persons.

4. For this reason the Lord is pictured to us in today's Gospel, mingling among the people, drawing all the world unto himself by his friendliness and comforting doctrine so that they may cling to him with their hearts, depend upon his goodness, and hope to receive from him both spiritual and temporal treasures. Nor do you see him take anything from those he heals and helps; yea, he receives nothing from them but scorn and mockery, as we shall hear. Good deeds proceed from him, but he receives

mockery and scorn in return.

5. Now this is preached and submitted to the whole world, that they may learn to know this man aright, and to know how to become Christians, not how to become good and innocent. Other doctrines outside of the Gospel, like the books of the heathen masters, insist that the people should through them become good; again, the legends of the saints especially insist that the people are to live as the saints lived. To make good people does not belong to the Gospel, for it only makes Christians. It takes much more to be a Christian than to be pious. A person can easily be pious, but not a Christian. A Christian knows nothing to say about his piety, for he finds in himself nothing good or pious. If he is to be pious, he must look for a different piety, a piety in some one else.

6. To this end Christ is presented to us as an inexhaustible fountain, who at all times overflows with pure goodness and grace. And for such goodness and kindness he accepts nothing, except that the good people, who acknowledge such kindness and grace, thank him for it, praise and love him, although others despise him for it. This is what he reaps from it. So one is not called a Christian because he does much, but because he receives something from Christ, draws from him and lets Christ only give to him. If one no longer receives anything from Christ, he is no longer a Christian, so that the name Christian continues to be based only on receiving, and not on giving and doing, and he receives nothing from any one except from Christ alone. If you look at what you do, you have already lost the Christian name. It is indeed true, that we are to do good works, help, advise and give to others; but no one is called a Christian by reason of that, nor is he on that account a Christian.

7. Therefore, if you wish to consider the word in its true meaning, you must identify a Christian by the fact that he only receives something from Christ, and has Christ within him; for this is what the word properly means. Just as a person is called "white," because of his white colour, black because of his dark colour, large because of his size. So also one is called a "Christian" because of Christ, who dwells in him and from whom he receives his blessings. So, if one is called a Christian because of Christ, he is certainly then not called a Christian because of his works. From this it also follows that no one is called a Christian by reason of his good works. If this be true, as it undoubtedly is, then it must follow that our orders and sects do not belong under the Christian name, and they do not develop Christians.

8. Therefore they are deceivers, who preach or teach in the church, and occupy themselves with commandments, works and statutes, that accomplish nothing. Although they pretend to be Christians, nevertheless they still, under this name, attempt to burden and torment us with their commands and works. By reason of my works I may well be called one who fasts, one who prays, or a pilgrim, but not a Christian. If you were to weave all your works together, and add to them all the works of others, you would still not have Christ, and from these things you could not be called a Christian. Christ is something different and higher than law and the commandments of men. He is the Son of God, who is ready alone to give and not to receive. If I am so wise as to take what he offers, I have him, and if I have him I am then justly called a Christian. Thus you have the distinction as to what a Christian is and what Christ is.

9. Now this Gospel teaches us that Christ is the greatest and highest person, renowned in all the world, not in order to terrify the people, but to pour out all earthly and heavenly gifts, so that all men may depend upon and trust in him, and continually receive from him alone what they need. If sin terrifies my

conscience and preachers of the law come and want to help me with their works, they will accomplish nothing. Christ alone can help here and no one else. Yea, the others only make it worse, even if they were Peter or Paul, or even Mary, the mother of God herself. Christ alone can do this, being ordained of God to the end that he should send forth the good news in which is proclaimed how my sins are to be forgiven gratuitously, with out any work or merit on my part, only and simply out of pure grace through faith in this Christ. If now I accept what is preached I have a comfort that my sins are forgiven me before God and before the world. If I at heart hold fast to this, then I am a Christian, and for this I thank God through Christ, who at all times gives me his Holy Spirit and grace, that sin may not harm me either here or at the day of judgment.

10. If I fear death and do not like to die, I find in this Christ a comfort and medicine, so that I care nothing for death. If terrified at the anger of God, I have here a Mediator. Many a one runs into the desert or puts on garments of coarse hair, and thinks he will force God not to be angry with him; but it will amount to nothing; whoever has not this Christ, on him the wrath of God remaineth forever, for it is so decreed. John 3, 36.

11. Therefore, whoever would have a joyful conscience that does not fear sin, death, hell, nor the wrath of God, dare not reject this Mediator, Christ. For he is the fountain that overflows with grace, that gives temporal and eternal life. Only open thy heart and hold it forth and you will receive all. He gushes and flows forth, and can do nothing else but only give, flow and gush forth, if you can only believe it. You justly deserve that people should call you a Christian, when you are called a Christian by virtue of what you receive from Christ; if not, and you want to give him so much, you are no Christian. This is the rich precious word which St. Paul praises so highly, and can never sufficiently praise, that he so graciously gives us his Son, to pour out his grace over all who receive it. Rom. 3, 24 and 8, 32; Gal. 3, 25.

12. From this it further follows, when a Christian does good works and shows love to his neighbour, that he does not thereby become a Christian or pious, but before this is done he must have been a Christian and pious. He indeed does good works, but his good works do not make him a Christian. The tree brings or yields good fruit, but the fruit does not make the tree good. So also here, no one becomes a Christian through his works, but through Christ.

13. From this you understand what kind of people Christians are, and what their kingdom is, namely, that they are a multitude that cling to Christ, and have one Spirit and the same gifts with him. And through this all Christians are equal, and no one has any more of Christ than another; St. Peter is no more than the thief on the cross; Mary the mother of God is no more than the sinner, Mary Magdalene. In external acts and works, of course, there is a difference among them, for the Virgin Mary had a greater work to do than Mary Magdalene, St. Peter a greater work than the thief on the cross. This is the case when we reckon according to works; but by virtue of our works we are not Christians. The Virgin Mary is not a Christian on account of her great work that she bore in her body Christ, such a costly and inexpressible treasure, as Christ said to the woman, Luke 11, 27-28, who cried aloud among the people to the Lord: "Blessed is the body that bore thee, and the breasts which thou hast sucked." "Yes, blessed are they," said he, "who hear the Word of God and keep it." Here you see he exalts believers above his mother. For Christians are called Christians because they believe in Christ. Virgin and mother are two very beautiful names, but they are nothing in comparison to the name of believers or Christians. Again, St. Paul is so proud, that in his Epistle to the Galatians, 2, 6, he gives the office of the great and high apostles a reputation which amounts to little before God, except as it brings a blessing and is of service

to others.

14. Therefore we are all alike through faith in Christ. Although St. Peter has a stronger faith than I, it is still the same faith in Christ. For his Father offers his Son Christ to the promiscuous crowd, and whoever receives him, gets the whole Christ, whether in weakness or in strength, it makes no difference. The woman in this Gospel who had been sick for a long time lays hold of Christ as well as Mary the Virgin, his mother did. Therefore Christians have the same Spirit, one is as high-born as another, St. Peter must call me his brother, and I can also call him my brother. Yea, Christ receives us unto himself and holds us as his brothers, as after his resurrection he said to Mary Magdalene: "Go unto my brethren and tell them, I ascend unto my Father and to your Father, to my God and to your God." John 20, 17. And St. Paul calls Christ the first-born among many brethren, Rom. 8, 29. Of this he speaks very beautifully in his First Epistle to the Corinthians, 8, 9-12, where he speaks of weak brethren thus: "But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to the weak. For if a man see thee who hast knowledge sitting at meat in an idol's temple, will not his conscience, if he is weak, be emboldened to eat things sacrificed to idols? For through thy knowledge he that is weak perisheth, the brother for whose sake Christ died. And thus, sinning against the brethren, and wounding their conscience when it is weak, ye sin against Christ."

15. The summary of this entire Gospel is, that we learn to know Christ aright, and not only that we have the mere name, but know that we have all things from him. If we are Christians we have all things, and God is our Father, and we are lords of all things in heaven and on earth; this no work of ours can bring to pass, be it as great and costly as it may. Now you see how far they are from the Christian name, who live under the dominion of the Pope. The Gospel preaches nothing but the one person, Christ; not even Mary, much less the Pope or any work, be it as costly as it can. It must offer Christ alone and no one else, whom God the Father has sent among us, only that we should draw all from him, and wait for his grace and goodness.

16. Now when they preach to you Christ as a judge, how he is to appear on the judgment day, and how you should do many good works that he may reward you for them, and you agree to this, then he will indeed be a judge to you and not a Savior. And if he be thus presented to you as people are accustomed to paint his mother showing him her breasts, this is actually to preach the devil and not Christ, who only gives but receives nothing. It is indeed true, when you have received from him, then good works will follow of themselves, without force or demand; and this is represented to us very beautifully in today's Gospel.

17. For here, you see, Christ preaches the Gospel to the people. Now preaching is no insignificant work, for here he does us a great service, in that he becomes our teacher and instructs us, how we may come to the knowledge of himself. This is a part of his great grace and kindness. While he is here on earth he does not cease to teach, so that we may receive him as our Savior and Redeemer; afterwards he follows us with his good works which he manifests everywhere to everyone as he needs. You find no one in the Gospel who ever asked anything of the Lord, whose help was denied and not given. As many as came to him, blind, deaf, lame, palsied and dropsical, he received and helped all as they desired, and healed them from all diseases, as Luke 6, 19 says: "And all the multitude sought to touch him; for power came forth from him, and healed them all."

PART II.--OF THE GOSPEL AND CHRIST IN DETAIL.

18. Thus he does also to this woman. The woman hears him preach, and perceives he is a good, indulgent man, who appears friendly toward all the world; then she also began to cleave to him and take courage to think, because he cut none away from him, she too was welcomed to enjoy his friendship and goodness. Therefore she lets all the Apostles go, and casts her heart's trust and confidence only on the Lord, and says to herself: "If I do but touch his garment, I shall be made whole."

19. Only see what a heart the woman had. Hers is indeed a noble, great faith and confidence. She did not think otherwise in her heart than that he would certainly help her, if she only touched his garment with her hand, and yet she is not so bold as to approach him openly. She regards herself as unworthy to speak to him or look at him; for she knows that she deserved nothing, and never did anything for the Lord. Therefore she so plans as to approach him from behind, falls down at his feet and merely touches the hem of his garment. There is nothing but mere awkwardness and unworthiness here. Who had merited that the Lord should permit the Gospel to be preached to these people? There is no preparation, no work; yet the poor woman is there and hopes to obtain great things from the Lord, that he would release her from her sickness. She had had an issue of blood for about twelve successive years. How could she earn anything under such circumstances, or how could she because of her disease be worthy of anything? Of course she was worthy, but only to receive and not to give; for at that time she was not able to give the least thing.

20. And this is the true preparation for the grace and goodness of Christ, that I feel my need of it. And then it harmonizes beautifully, that the two meet together, the rich and the poor, Christ and the sinner. Yet it is a great art, to persuade people that they are poor and in need of grace. It is a difficult matter, nor does the devil permit it to be done, but always diverts the people to their good works, that they may under no circumstances receive the idea that they stand in need of the grace and mercy of Christ.

21. The text says the wretched woman had the issue of blood for twelve years, and to cure it, had spent all her living upon physicians. And the more she spent for this purpose, the worse she became. Luke and Mark both especially refer to this, and show thereby that, the more the law and works are preached, the worse it becomes among us, and we receive nothing from it but one harm and injury after another. The conscience can never be quieted by our good works. When one sin is expelled from the conscience, another soon enters, yea, the medicine and the work often make a sin, where otherwise there is none, until we come to Christ; as this woman here who had been sick so long and would never have received help, had she never come to Christ, from whom she received her health without any work whatever; she gives him nothing, and only receives from him, and allows him to give.

22. So it goes with all sermons that do not preach Christ, and it is here indicated that we must constantly employ the Word, and always exercise ourselves in the Word without intermission, for such men we still find at all times, who have like anxious and troubled consciences. For this woman signifies all poor consciences who have an issue of blood, that is, they feel their sins. And the issue of blood flows continually and cannot cease. For flesh and blood does nothing but what they wish. Now when feeling gets the upperhand, the wretched people go to work and want to help themselves; then one does this, the other that, and none as yet has accomplished anything.

23. Hence many orders and institutions have arisen because men have conjured up so many works that all of them can scarcely be named. What was the cause of all this? Nothing but the conscience tormented with sin, that has so exercised and harrassed us, that we thought thereby to redeem our souls and be free from all sins. But Christ was not in it, because we only wished to give without receiving. Therefore it has ever become worse with us, as with this woman, whom all the physicians endeavoured to heal, but she never found one able to help her. Thus too we have believed all the physicians; if any one came who had accomplished some little work we welcomed him. Dear Lord, we were anxious to be well, were anxious to have a joyful conscience, and were anxious to be free from sin.

24. The physicians are the preachers of the law and the lords over Christians. If one were very anxious to be free from sin, what did they do to him? They gave him medicine from which he only became weaker and sicker. This we have seen and in part also felt a great deal, how, to our great and real injury, the people sought to be good by means of their own works, and thereby deliver themselves from sin. But it did no good, we only became more and more discouraged by sin and death, so that there were no more discouraged people to be found on earth than just the priests, the monks, the nuns, and those who go about with their good works. If one had a boil, then the druggists had to work, there was a drugging, a going and running as though the soul would immediately pass away; thus they were afraid and discouraged. And no one fears the last judgment so keenly as just these very spiritual people. This they also beautifully show, when they so treat of works that they always add one work to the other, and never constantly trust in any single work; and the more they do the worse they become, the more discouraged and unbelieving they become, and it is with them just as with this woman.

25. It is quite a beautiful parable, and is well adapted for our benefit. We have not only spent our temporal goods for this purpose. but we have also risked our lives with fasting, with castigation, and with other unbearable burdens, so that some become insane over it, and lose all their natural strength and finally lose their souls in the bargain. I have also been one of these and have been caught deeper in this drugstore than many others. I could not so quickly come to the point, to cast to the winds the law of the Pope. It was a bitter and difficult task for me to eat meat on Friday, and conclude that the law and order of the Pope amounted to nothing. God help us, how difficult it was for me, before I dared to do it! Therefore one should become free from this in his conscience, and despise the traditions of the Pope, to do which he must indeed have a strong, firm foundation in faith; if he has this not, he will think several times before he takes the risk.

26. And as it was with this woman, who spent all her living upon the physicians, and even then was not made whole, yea, only became worse, so it is with us. Here all our works, cares and labours are lost. Here all our human obedience and all our orders fall to the ground, and all we spent in that line was wholly lost. Now we see the laws and traditions of the Pope and the bishops are nothing, before which we trembled and feared. All this helped us just as much as it did this poor woman, who spent all her goods and possessions, yes, and also risked her life to this end. O, what medicine and treatment this woman had to use! How tried, weak and sick she often became from them! Yea, if she could have become well, she would have devoured the whole drugstore. But all availed nothing, she had to bear her sickness for twelve long years.

27. But how was the poor woman at last helped? As soon as she approached the man called Christ and placed her hope and comfort in him, she became well. But who directed her to this man? Of course the physicians did not. For when our pastors preach Christ, the affairs of the Pope and all his traditions are

overthrown. Who then told her? She heard it from some one who also had been healed, and that not by the physicians. He without doubt told her there was one who is called Jesus, who is a friendly, gracious man, helps everyone, and allows no one to go from his presence unassisted, and that he is sent from God just for the purpose of helping everyone. And many had told her who received help from him. So that they also brought her to him. As the woman heard these things she abandoned the physicians and went to Christ.

28. And so it takes place today. Christ is not preached, but only mere human works: do this, and do that. And in spite of this the knowledge of Christ enters among the people, what we are to expect of him, and that he alone must do everything, without our works and merit. When we hear this voice we follow him, and obey his Word, and let the physicians go for good, and care no longer for the preachers of the law or of works, nor inquire about their commandments and traditions, but we go with all the desire of our heart to this man, called Christ, and say: Yes, indeed, from this man we must receive it without any merit, yea, how foolish I acted, that I ventured so much for it! May God bless thee, my dear Pope! May God bless you, my dear bishops, monks and priests, I shall never need your medicine again, your work and merit, your commandments and traditions, you have martyred me too long with these things. I have found one who gives me all things freely, that I in time past had to buy from you with piles of money. He gives it to me without work or merit, whereas I before had to risk my body, strength, health and life for it. Good night and farewell! I will never come to you again.

29. Thus one becomes a Christian, not by the decretals of the Pope, or by means of works and human traditions, but by the grace and kindness of Christ. Now whoever has a troubled, distressed conscience, fears sin and is terrified at death, or otherwise experiences no good in himself, let him come hither to this man and confess what ails him, call upon him, and he will most certainly help. "Pour out your heart before him; God is a refuge for us," Ps. 62. 8; 50, 15, and say to him: Behold, here is an empty vessel that needs to be filled. Fill it, O Lord! I am weak in faith, strengthen me; I am cold in love, warm me and make me burn, that my love may flow out to my neighbour. I have not a firm, strong faith, at times I doubt, and cannot wholly trust in God! Alas, Lord, help me, increase in me my faith and trust. I have locked up the treasure of all my goods in thee. I am poor, thou art rich, and hast mercy on the poor, I am a sinner, and thou art righteous. In me is the river of sin; in thee is all fullness and righteousness.

30. If you once learn this, the laws of the Pope cannot take thee captive. From his laws and commands you receive nothing, but like this woman you spend everything you have, your body and goods, and at last your soul besides. And then you will say: I desire him from whom I can receive something, not him to whom I must give.

31. The other Gospels write thus of this woman: When she became well Jesus felt that a power had gone out of him, and turned to the people and asked: "Who is it that touched me? And then the Disciples answered: "Master, the multitudes press thee and crush thee;" but the Lord was not satisfied with this, and replied: "Some one did touch me; for I perceived that power had gone forth from me," Mark. 5, 25; Luke 8, 46; I know that some one has received something from me. The Lord did all this because this woman's faith was acceptable to him, which he desired to make known to all people. For he desires nothing more than that a man trust and believe in him. It was also done for the sake of the ruler, to confirm his faith by this miracle and transaction. Therefore Mark writes thus: As the woman saw that the Lord knew it, she feared and trembled and came and cast herself at the feet of the Lord and told him all in truth that was done to her by him. Then the Lord goes to work and absolves her and says to her:

"Daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace, and be whole of thy plague."

32. Are not these friendly words? What joy must not this woman have experienced, as she permitted another to show her a kindness? This joy and peace all receive, who look to this man for help. Now where this joy is there its works must immediately follow, which prove this joy. So the peace and joy in this woman had to become manifest. For as soon as she received the good deed from the Lord, she confessed it before all the people, and was not ashamed to have it told that she received something from him, and yet gave nothing for it. This work and thanksgiving, however, God desires from us, namely, that we confess and proclaim his kindness, grace and good deeds before all men, so that others may also come and receive his benefits as this woman did. Thus my Christian life urges me to do good to others, as God has done to me through Christ, only that thus Christ may become known; but thereby I do not become a Christian. Just as this woman is not made whole by her knowledge, for she was well before all her work and knowledge. But after she becomes well she confesses Christ, and praises him, only for the good of others, and goes and does good works, one after the other. Thus we, too, live, if we are only Christians, in order that one may serve the others wherever we can. Hence, as this woman became well before she did all her works, so we Christians must also become whole before we can do any good works.

CONCERNING THE DAUGHTER OF THE RULER.

34. As the Gospel is represented in this woman, so it is also represented to us in the daughter of the ruler. This ruler of the Synagogue whom Mark calls Jairus, had a strong faith and confidence in the Lord that he would raise his deceased daughter to life. For had he not had such a disposition of heart toward him, he would not have come to him, and requested a thing of him which was by nature impossible. Therefore in this he shows his faith. When now the Lord observed the faith in him, he could not but do his will, and immediately arose and went with him. During his journey the history of this woman takes place, who had been sick for twelve years, as we have heard.

35. And when Jesus came into the ruler's house, and saw the flute-players and the crowd making a tumult, who were there in compliance with the law of Moses, and blew with horns and trumpets, as in our country the bells are rung, to call the people together; he commanded the people and the flute-players to give place and said: "The damsel is not dead, but sleepeth." And they laughed him to scorn.

This means that, when the preaching of the Word goes forth thus, that Christ is the man who helps and our works will not do it, then the world cannot avoid it, it must laugh and scorn, and be offended (1 Cor. 1, 23), for it is not acceptable to the world that Christ should help us. As the people do here, who said without doubt: Alas, this is a grand master or doctor, what shall he help? for he does not know what it is to sleep or enter the grave.

36. In the world the Gospel must have the reputation of being a foolish sermon, despised and scorned; for the devil cannot hear that this preaching is honoured in the world, for it brings no advantage to his kingdom, this he feels, of course, and hence he attacks it with all cunning, so that he may hinder it and cause it to be worthless among his own followers, whose hearts he has entirely blinded and possessed, that the light of the Gospel may not shine for them, as St. Paul says in 2 Cor. 4, 4. For it is impossible that the preaching of Christ should not produce some fruit. It will not be preached in vain, Is. 55, 11;

although there be but few who receive it, it matters not.

37. As Satan feels it is a loss to him, and that the preaching of the Word is directed against his kingdom, he has no rest, he persecutes, despises and attacks it on all sides, as he at present rages and storms in all the world. For the preaching of Christ overthrows everything pleasing to the devil and the world, and what the world regards as the most holy and costly. For the world paints for itself a god who accepts our good works, and is pleased with the mass, vigils, foundations, rosaries, caps, pates, hempen ropes, and what more be the works of fools with which the Pope is employed. Now when one comes and brings the Gospel, and preaches against this nonsense of the Pope, and he is obliged to do, and says: It is nothing, it is deception, it is opposed to Christ and the Scriptures; he must suffer himself to be called a heretic and a worthless fellow, a perverter of the people, and then they quite grandly assert: Do you want to rule the whole world? do you think you are the wisest? Our forbears also were not fools. Many holy, pious people have done these works and preached of them, should you first come to destroy all? This must not be! Then the raging and storming time begins, with persecution and death, and the devil will claim he is right, let it go as it may.

38. This is enough on today's Gospel for the present. Mark well, that you learn from the Gospels that all things are to be found in the one person who is called Christ. And remember, too, that a Christian receives his name alone from Christ. I do not say this in vain, for I know what it costs to keep it, in temptation and in the battle of life. Let us call upon God for grace, that we may take this in earnest, and grasp it with our hearts. Amen.

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