

## *Small Group Faith Fellowship #1*

Week of Sunday, October 11, 2015 - Trinity 19

Prayer Book, p. 215-217

Ephesians 4:17-32

Matthew 9:1-8

### **Background:**

“Positive Change”: we all want it, but all who have tried it know “it don’t come easy”. The world is full of its own recommendations for making positive change, but the Christian Faith has its own unique approach, as this Sunday’s lessons teach us. We come to God seeking positive change in our life – and how does God respond?

In this Sunday’s gospel (Matthew 9:1-8), a paralytic (the Prayer Book calls this “palsy”, but paralysis is probably what is meant) comes to Jesus, seeking “positive change”. First Jesus forgives his sins and only then (as proof of his power to forgive sins) heals him – so he is able to get up and walk home.

It is easy to read this just on the surface – a story of forgiveness and healing. Digging deeper, we realize the healing and the forgiveness are connected. The healing we see is the proof of the forgiveness we don’t see (but know only by believing the word of Jesus). Thus the healing is the “outward and visible sign”, and the forgiveness is “the inward and spiritual grace” it signifies.

As a sign, the healing has something to teach us about sin and the grace that forgives it. It teaches us that **sin is spiritual/moral paralysis**; it teaches that **grace heals and liberates us from spiritual/moral paralysis**, so that there can be positive change in our life – we can “get up and walk” in newness of life according to God’s commandments.

According to Fr Dunbar, the Scriptures say there are three basic steps to positive change.

1. Changing what we are: change doesn’t start with us. We don’t generate the change. (The paralytic does not heal himself!) **Change in us starts outside us**, in God, who sends his Son to give the free gift of his forgiving grace to those who believe in him – so that we are no longer under judgment (for sin) but under grace (forgiven, accepted, loved). Only when we have received this grace, by believing and trusting the gospel, can positive change begin to happen.
2. Changing how we think: “be renewed in the spirit of your mind” (Ephesians 4:23). We have to let the grace we have received change not only what we are, but how we think. **Grace will shape a whole new set of motivations** for action – no longer fear, guilt, or pride, but gratitude, and love.
3. Changing what we do: once grace has changed what we are, and changed the way we think, then it needs to be expressed in action, in decisive changes in our life – **not just breaking old bad habits, but creating new good ones.**

## Open:

What did you hear in this Sunday's teaching? What struck you the most?

Was there anything that was new to you, or surprised you?

Was there anything that puzzled you? anything you did not understand?

Did it raise any questions or issues for you?

## Dig:

What do you think it means to say that "**sin is spiritual paralysis**"?

What do you think is meant by "**grace**" (in the Biblical sense of the word)? Where does it come from? How do we get it? What does it do?

What do you think is the importance of "**being renewed in your mind**" by grace? For positive change to happen, why do our motivations need to change and how does grace change them?

How is this teaching about positive change different from other approaches we hear in the world today?

## Close:

What part of this Sunday's teaching do you think needs further exploration?

How might this Sunday's teaching be applied in your life?

## Pray:

Thank God for bringing everyone together in fellowship for the sharing of faith. Thank him for the gift of his Word and Spirit, and ask him for help to know and experience more fully the gift of his grace in your life.