

"There Is No Free Lunch"

Text: Matthew 4:12-17, 23-25

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 ***"Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, ²⁰ for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body."*** Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians: Those of you who still bother with the local newspaper may have noticed that this week the ND Senate rejected a bill that would have provided "free lunches" for all ND students K-12. Ironically, the last line of the article that discussed the proposed *free lunch* program read: *"The program would have cost \$65 million dollars."* Though there is no such thing, referring to it as a "free lunch" sounds so much more palatable than *"American taxpayers will pay for the lunches of all ND students, the vast majority of which are from families that are both willing and able to buy their own food."* It also sounds so much better than, *"Under the program, the government will first take money from taxpayers and then give it back to them to feed their children."*

The point is that there is, figuratively and literally, *no such thing* as "free lunch." That is the theme under which we will consider our text for this morning. That text is found in Matthew's Gospel, the Fourth Chapter:

ESV ***Matthew 4:12-17, 23-25*** ***Now when he heard that John had been arrested, he (Jesus) withdrew into Galilee. ¹³ And leaving Nazareth he went and lived in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, ¹⁴ so that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: ¹⁵ "The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles-- ¹⁶ the people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned." ¹⁷ From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." ²³ ¶ And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people. ²⁴ So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, those oppressed by demons, epileptics, and paralytics, and he healed them. ²⁵ And great crowds followed him from Galilee and the Decapolis, and from Jerusalem and Judea, and from beyond the Jordan.***

This is God's Word. This is not only the Word of God, it is the very place

where that same God has promised to meet with us. To prepare our hearts to meet here with our God, to sit humbly at his feet, and to learn from him, so we pray, ***"Sanctify us in the Truth, O Lord. Your Word is truth!"*** Amen.

A couple of questions immediately present themselves in our text. First, why did Jesus immediately ***"withdraw into Galilee"*** when he heard that John the Baptist had been arrested? The most likely answer is that Jesus recognized that his enemies in and around Jerusalem had become a clear and present danger. They were growing bolder in their opposition, and Jesus realized that he would be their next logical target. But Jesus didn't flee into Galilee out of cowardice. Never in human history has anyone shown more raw courage than our Savior. His public ministry had just begun, and there was much to do before he offered himself up to his enemies – which was undoubtedly why he decided to go to Galilee and to begin his ministry there, far from his enemies in and around Jerusalem.

Our text tells us that the Prophet Isaiah spoke of this move 700 years before it took place. The second question is, therefore, did Jesus move to Galilee to fulfill that prophecy? God, who exists outside of human time, had already seen this event before it happened, which is why he was able to inspire Isaiah to write about it seven Centuries earlier as having already happened. To the timeless God, it already had. It is a mistake to imagine that Jesus, aware of the prophecies, went about fulfilling them just to prevent his Father from becoming a liar. When we read in our text that Jesus went and lived in Capernaum ***"so that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled..."*** understand that the word translated ***"so that"*** can indicate either purpose or result. Here it seems result is preferable (Jesus' move *resulted* in the fulfillment of the prophecy) though it remains an open question – as long as we do not imagine that the fulfillment of the prophecy was ever in doubt. We remain hindered in our understanding because we are bound by time.

What we can know for certain, both from John's arrest and execution, and from Jesus' move to Galilee, is that though we rightly view our forgiveness as both free and complete, it was only free from our perspective. It cost Jesus dearly. In fact it cost Jesus everything. There is no free lunch.

It is also a mistake to image that the only cost to Jesus was what he paid on Calvary's cross. The cost to Jesus began at his conception, where he not only left the perfection of heaven but permanently took

into his divine nature our humanity, our human nature. And the cost continued to mount every moment of every day for the next 33 years. Since only a sinless life could be offered on the cross as the perfect, complete, acceptable sacrifice, Jesus had to battle temptation every single moment of his earthly life, and he had to emerge from every temptation and carry to the cross an absolutely flawless, undefeated record. He also paid in that he experienced hunger, thirst, exhaustion, sorrow, and betrayal along the way – all the things that not only make life on earth difficult but that also weaken our resolve to resist temptation. Every day of his life on earth cost Jesus. Never imagine that that which has been given to us free of charge did not cost our Savior dearly.

Nor is the price always obvious. Sometimes the actual cost of something in our lives is hidden in the fine print. Free computer programs are often only free to download. You have to pay to use them. Free dinners and cruises require you to sit through interminable high-pressure sales pitches where they do everything they can to shame you into paying for your “free gift” by buying their outrageously expensive products or services. Your free gift is actually paid for by those who fell prey to their sales pitches.

Our text included some “fine print” that revealed additional cost borne by our Savior. There we read: **“From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.’”** Interesting, first of all, that we are told that the initial message preached by Jesus here at the start of his ministry was exactly the same as John the Baptist’s message: **“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”** In the minds of most Christians, John’s message was the law and Jesus’ message was the gospel. The reality is that both John and Jesus preached both law and gospel. How does Jesus’ initial message represent a cost to him? Because the message, though necessary, is never what anyone wants to hear. Not then, not now. It typically makes people hostile toward those who even suggest it. Human beings want to be told how good they are, how deserving of love, respect, and admiration. To put it another way, we would rather hear a lie than the truth. **“Repent!”** shouts just the opposite message – that we are not naturally good, pure, and righteous. It reminds us that we have something to feel guilty about and that we have sin (which is also never free of charge). Throughout his life and ministry Jesus spoke law when and where necessary. We all know instinctively what others want to hear. It’s the fuel that social media like Facebook runs on. Jesus gave the people what they needed, not what they wanted, and it cost him.

Jesus obviously didn’t stop there, since **“Repent!”** only crushes. Our text then goes on to tell that Jesus expanded his message from simply **“Repent!”** to **“proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom.”** That gospel message was not that forgiveness and salvation are free. It was that he himself was paying the bill and providing it to sinners without cost *to the sinner*. The Christian faith is really then all about who paid the bill for mankind’s sin.

At first glance what we read next in our text seems to disprove our theme, for there we are told that **“they brought him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, those oppressed by demons, epileptics, and paralytics, and he healed them.”** It certainly seems that there you have it – something for nothing. The free lunch. Miraculous healing that cost the recipients nothing and evidently cost Jesus nothing.

First of all, we don’t know the latter to be true – that it cost Jesus nothing. You will recall how an ailing woman once touched Jesus as he walked by and she was healed. We read next: **And Jesus, perceiving in himself that power had gone out from him, immediately turned about in the crowd and said, “Who touched my garments?”**^{ESV} (Mark 5:30) Miracles like healing didn’t just happen. It required power from the Son of God. We have no idea the physical toll that outflow of power may have had on Jesus.

In a sense, the miraculous healings recorded in our text were also not entirely free for those who were healed, and it is just here that we encounter the most difficult aspect of our theme: *Forgiveness is free, true discipleship is not. True discipleship, after we are brought to faith, has a price.* Both truths are clearly taught in God’s Word. This is the most difficult aspect of our theme because the truth is bordered by the ditches of gross damning error on either side. The one ditch is that man adds to or cooperates with his justification before God – that salvation required the combined effort of God and man. The other ditch is that God has no expectation of change in our lives and actions after we are brought to faith. Jesus’ message of repentance and the miracles he performed must be considered together. Repentance was more than just a word to Jesus. True repentance is more than just “sorry.” It includes turning away from sin. It costs us in that it includes the call to abandon our old ways in favor of God’s. It costs us in that it includes abandoning “self” and “self-rule.” It costs us in that the sin that our old Adam finds so pleasurable no longer has a place in our lives. It costs us in that our natural sinful pride needs to be abandoned in favor of Godly

humility. Again, this is not a component of the cost of our salvation, it is the unavoidable price of discipleship after we are brought to faith. Which means that here, once again, there is no free lunch.

The miracles described in our text testified to Jesus' authority to preach repentance, and they stripped the people of every imaginable excuse regarding Jesus and his message and mission. The miracles didn't just happen, Jesus performed them. That made him different from everyone else. They demonstrated a power that could only come from God. The miracles therefore laid a burden on those who received their benefit. To continue to reject Jesus as Savior after receiving the benefit of his miracles carried a heavy penalty.

In fact if you read on in Matthew's Gospel you will find that the majority of those who witnessed and benefited from the miracles described in our text stubbornly continued to reject Jesus. You will recall Jesus' condemnation of these same people when they obstinately refused to believe in him *despite* the incredible miracles they witnessed. Matthew recorded Jesus' words seven chapters after our text: ***"Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. ²² But I tell you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you. ²³ And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You will be brought down to Hades. For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. ²⁴ But I tell you that it will be more tolerable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom than for you."*** ^{ESV}(Matthew 11:21-24)

The people in and around Capernaum wanted nothing to do with the Jesus who saves. They wanted only the Jesus who heals. Jesus alone earned our sin payment, but he has every right to expect the fruits of faith in the lives of those he has rescued. Hear again the passage from 1 Corinthians 6 with which we began: ***"Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, ²⁰ for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body."***

This is not bad or discouraging news to the new man that God has created in us, but it is to our sinful flesh. Expect Satan to attempt to exploit that natural weakness in you. If he cannot convince you that you must pay for your salvation with your works, he will try to discourage you when life on earth is hard. He will try to convince you that since salvation is God's free gift, God has no right to condemn anything that you do, as he has no

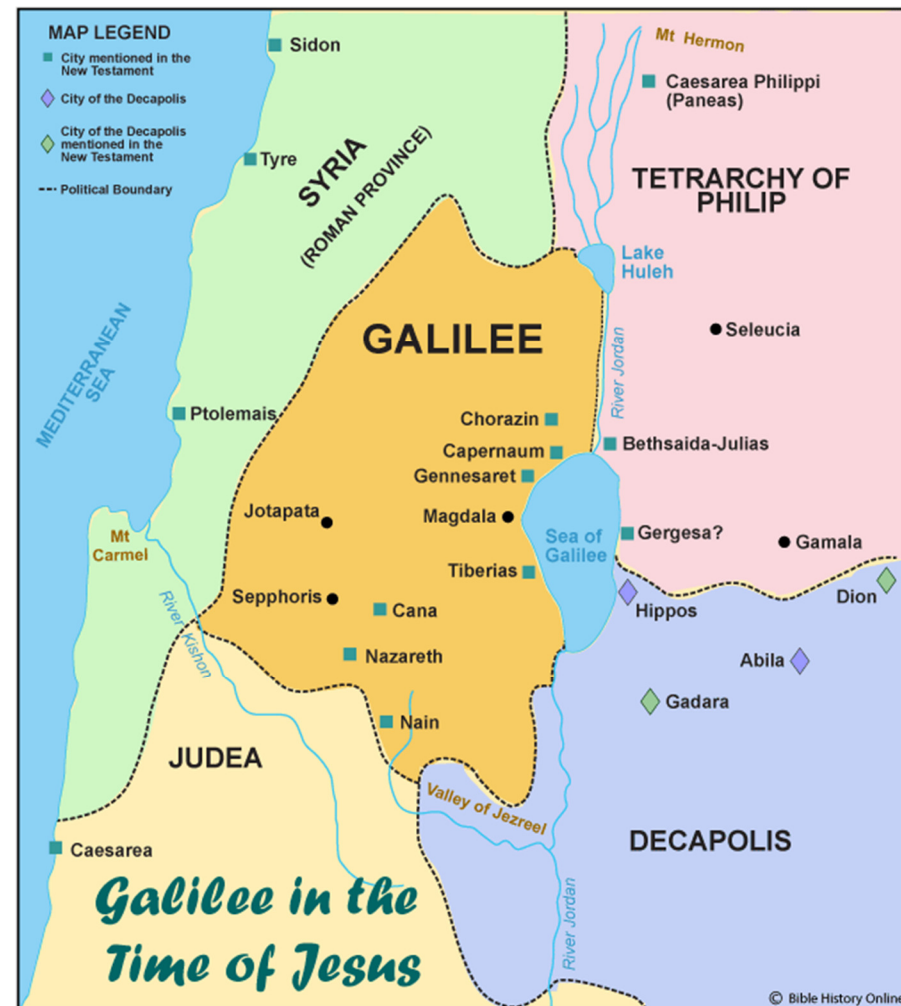
right to expect you to serve as his ambassador and witness to the world.

The reality is that God himself, through the effort of his Son Jesus, has paid the debt for every one of our sins. Through no merit or work of our own, we have full and complete forgiveness. Through the working of the Holy Spirit we are now his own beloved children and heirs of eternal life. It is now no kind of burden to serve him, or to recognize that he has made us ***"a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession"*** for a holy purpose: ***"that we may proclaim the excellencies of him who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light."*** Amen.

ESV **Isaiah 9:1-7** But there will be no gloom for her who was in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he has made glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations. ² The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined. ³ You have multiplied the nation; you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as they are glad when they divide the spoil. ⁴ For the yoke of his burden, and the staff for his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian. ⁵ For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult and every garment rolled in blood will be burned as fuel for the fire. ⁶ For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. ⁷ Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

ESV **1 Corinthians 1:10-18** I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment. ¹¹ For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers. ¹² What I mean is that each one of you says, "I follow Paul," or "I follow Apollos," or "I follow Cephas," or "I follow Christ." ¹³ Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? ¹⁴ I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, ¹⁵ so that no one may say that you were baptized in my name. ¹⁶ (I did baptize also the household of Stephanas. Beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized anyone else.) ¹⁷ For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. ¹⁸ ¶ For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

ESV **Matthew 4:12-17, 23-25** Now when he heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew into Galilee. ¹³ And leaving Nazareth he went and lived in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, ¹⁴ so that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: ¹⁵ "The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles-- ¹⁶ the people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned." ¹⁷ From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." ²³ ¶ And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people. ²⁴ So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, those oppressed by demons, epileptics, and paralytics, and he healed them. ²⁵ And great crowds followed him from Galilee and the Decapolis, and from Jerusalem and Judea, and from beyond the Jordan.



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The 3rd Sunday after Epiphany – January 25, 2026

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 282

"O God from God, O Light from Light"

The Order of Service – Hymnal page 31ff. *(Blue Hymnal)*

The Scripture Lessons: *(Printed on the back page of this bulletin)*

The First Lesson: (Isaiah 9:1-7) We read the Old Testament not just as an assortment of writings about someone else at some other time. We read it with the understanding that the prophecies found there often refer to Christ Jesus, who is also *our* Savior. The good things that are there promised are therefore promised to believers of all ages, including Christians today.

The Psalm of the Day – Psalm 85 (Page 85)

The New Testament Lesson: (1 Corinthians 1:10-18) Our present society believes that doctrinal unity is simply not possible. Our second reading tells us otherwise. The key is to hear and follow only God's inspired Word, not human opinion, and to focus not on man but on Jesus Christ. So also we today identify as "Lutheran" only to differentiate ourselves from others. The reality is that we are, first and foremost, Christians.

The Confession of Faith -

The Nicene Creed *(Blue Hymnal page 34)*

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 171

"All Praise to Him"

The Sermon – Text: Matthew 4:12-17, 23-25 *(See back page)*

"There's No Free Lunch"

The Offertory – (Projected on Screens)

The Post-Sermon Hymn – 570 *(Stanzas 1-3)*

"If God Himself Be for Me"

The Prayers of the Day, Followed by the Lord's Prayer

The Preparation for Holy Communion *(Blue Hymnal page 38)*

The Distribution

The Nunc Dimittis and Thanksgiving *(Blue Hymnal page 41)*

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn – 172 *(Stanzas 1 & 3)*

"Now Thank We All Our God"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with churches and missions throughout the United States and around the world. We are glad you are here. Thank you for letting us share the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, and come again.

Attendance – Sunday (37) **Average** (38)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday school or Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service with Holy Communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour
Wednesday	-7:00 p.m.	– Midweek Bible Study
Next Sunday	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour

CLC News – Pastor John Hein has announced his retirement from both the pastoral ministry and the ILC Board of Regents. Pastor Wayne Eichstadt has been appointed to the Board of Regents and will continue to serve as CLC Secretary until a replacement can be appointed. Pastor Rich Kanzenbach has announced his retirement from the pastoral ministry this summer. Pastor Aaron Ude has received the call to Holy Cross of Phoenix. Pastor Michael Wilke has returned the part-time call to Our Redeemer's of Red Wing. Messiah of Eau Claire has called Pastor Jonah Albrecht. Trinity of Spokane has called Pastor Johnathan Schnose. Mr. Peter Reim has returned the vacancy call to Our Redeemer's of Red Wing, MN.

Church Council Notes – All members of the Church Council were present for the meeting on January 18th. Treasurer Mantz reported strong offerings for December, resulting in a positive year-end balance in the General Fund. A new project list is posted on the mailbox table. Mark Redlin and Mick Johnson have been appointed to serve as the Financial Inspection Committee. Work continues on the various church policy statements and alternate insurance carriers. Next Council meeting is scheduled for Feb 15th.

Care Package – All are invited to contribute to a care package being prepared for our lone out-of-town student, Aidan Pfennig. Deadline for contributions is Sunday, February 8th.