

In the name of Jesus; Amen.

Jesus has better than 20/20 vision. He can see our hearts. He knows what we think. That ought to fill us with a bit of humility. We can bottle up and hide things and never speak about our deepest fears, sins, hopes, and wishes to others. But Jesus sees them all. He knows when we are angry with others, when we hate others, when we lust after others, when we are jealous. He knows if we are here this morning just because it is our duty, part of the weekly checklist. He knows if we gather together on Sunday and are more excited to socialize, than to hear what He has to say to us and receive His care and forgiveness. He knows when we grumble against Him and doubt if what we hear in church or read in the Bible actually helps us in our day to day lives. Just look at the grumbling scribes. They say in their hearts, "This man blasphemes." He can't forgive. He's not God. His Word is empty. And Jesus sees their hearts.

But among this crowd packed into Jesus' home in his own city of Capernaum, where people were crowding into doorways and windows, jamming up the street outside, just to see and hear Jesus, Jesus sees something else. He sees faith. He knows the hearts of a certain group of men trying to approach Jesus. The good buddies, or family, or caring Christian friends bring their loved one, a paralytic, to Jesus. But so many people were gathered around Jesus at the house where He stayed, to hear His life-giving preaching and Word, that the paralytic and his friends could not get to the Lord. So, as we read in Mark and Luke, they climbed onto the roof, removed tiles from off a house that was not their own, and lowered the man on ropes, which was risky and could have harmed their friend if they were not careful. But they had faith that what Jesus would say and do for their friend would be best. And Jesus saw their faith.

The first thing He says to the man is, "Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven." It sure seems as if Jesus' spoke an empty word. The Jewish scribes thought that Jesus was speaking a blasphemous word, by doing something that only God can do. Clearly this paralytic was in need of physical help, of healing. Does it not seem as if Jesus' words are empty, misapplied, way off? For those of you who have seen loved ones suffering from sickness, you might be confused, even angry, if the doctor said in the face of surgery, cancer, organ failure, or dementia, "Be happy, your loved one's sins are forgiven." We might be inclined to not like Jesus' words because forgiveness of sins does not appear to help. What is most important, we might think, is

alleviation or removal of physical pain. That is something we must repent of: putting our faith for a good life in doctors. By thinking that our body's health is the most important thing above all else, that a healthy body makes a strong faith, or that doctors or science is the only way to have a life worth living is to totally forget about the other part of us: our souls, our spiritual life. We listen much more readily to doctors for our bodies than we do to pastors for our souls. Really, it often seems that the more important issue, if one had to pick, are those relating to physical or health issues with our bodies, not those many sins and lack of faith, and broken relationships in our lives that we need forgiveness and reconciliation for. Jesus can see our hearts.

But Jesus would have us reorient our thinking. Jesus does not say first, "Be healed" but "Take heart." He does not say "You are healed" but "Your sins are forgiven." Jesus does not heal first and forgive second. He forgives first. He shows us what is most serious, what demands His attention first and foremost. He goes right to the problem, right to the cause of our physical pain and affliction: sin. What good would it have been for Jesus to have healed this paralytic, but never have proclaimed to him that He was right with God in Jesus? What good would it have been for Jesus to heal a body that would in time die, without giving the man the hope of eternal life? What good would it have been if Jesus saved the man's body in this life, but he lost both his body and soul in hell in the life to come? Jesus would show us that to be forgiven, to be right with God is the most important reality we can have in our life. Before you die, Jesus would have you take heart, be encouraged, stand up and know that you are reconciled to God and forgiven because Jesus died in your place with your sins, and rose again so that you may too.

But see how Jesus does not stop there. He does not just take care of one part of us, only our souls but not our bodies. In the face of those who doubt that Jesus has the authority and power to actually forgive sins, who doubt that Jesus is truly the Savior of all men, and especially of them that believe, Jesus cares for the body as well. It was easier to *say*, "Your sins are forgiven," Jesus acknowledges, because no one can see with their eyes if anything has changed. But Jesus takes care of our bodies as well. He bids the paralytic rise and walk, and go to his house. Jesus speaks the harder word too.

Though it was more difficult to say, "Rise and walk," consider Jesus' words in this way: which is easier to *do*: To forgive the sins of the whole world, or to heal every paralytic? We must always remember that it was much more difficult for Jesus to bring about forgiveness, than for Him to heal broken bodies. In order for Him to win forgiveness for all people, His body was

broken, pierced, flogged, and nailed to a cross. His soul was burdened with the temptations, despairs, anger, bitterness, and sin that we commit against the God who created us to love and obey Him. He saw the hearts of all people, drew the poison of our sin out, and let it kill Him so that we might live. He was laid, not on a stretcher, but in a tomb.

Jesus sees what troubles your heart. He knows what thoughts, fears, sins, and feelings you have. And he sees your faith, just like the paralytic and his friends. Like the friends of the paralytic, you can seek to bring your friends to Jesus, when you invite them here, into the nearer presence of Christ. It may be risky, like letting down a stretcher and balancing your friend. It may mean that you do something you've never done before and ask if you can accompany them to the healing words of Jesus. But the risk is worth it, if you can bring them to the words of forgiveness spoken by Jesus here. Like these friends, you may not have to scale roof, remove tiles, and let down stretchers to hear Jesus speak to you, but you may have to take initiative to rearrange schedules and priorities, go to bed earlier on Saturday, or be intentional about praying and reading your Bible each day at home.

All the while, Christ promises to be with you. Did you notice that in the Old Testament, the proof that God has not forgotten you is because He has blotted out our transgressions and sins like a cloud, made white and wooly in the blood of the Lamb. God tells us to remember that He remembers! And the way we know He remembers us is because He sent Christ to die for our sin and brings Jesus to us over and over again, to refresh our hearts, forgive our sins, to direct our desires. He will not leave you, but will fulfill the promises He made to you in Baptism, to give you forgiveness every day, life in relationship with Him, and eternal salvation far from the troubles of this world. He will bring you safely through chronic illness, surgery, and recovery. He will bring you through trials, temptations, addictions, despair. He will not leave you alone, pickings for the devil, He will give you strength to meet the challenges you face in your life. Why? Because He has redeemed you. He has paid for your sins that you might be His own and have hope. He is with you always.

Jesus heals the paralytic in the face of the scoffing and unbelief of the scribes, so that they may know that Jesus has authority over the earth to forgive sins. And as the healing of the paralytic showed, Jesus' words are not empty. As surely as the paralytic was healed, so too were his sins forgiven. Jesus has this authority over our broken sinful lives because He takes all of our sin and disfunction and sickness to the cross to die with it, physical and spiritual, the root and the

symptoms, the whole evil mess. Christianity is not just a spiritual religion. It is a physical one too. It is, after all, the body of Christ that saved us. What we need to remember is this: forgiveness is never just for the soul. It is for all of you, body and soul. So, when you hear each week, “In the stead and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ, I forgive you all your sins,” or “May this the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ strengthen and preserve you in body and soul to life everlasting” rejoice in hearing those words, more than in anything else. You are forgiven and guaranteed that your body and soul will one day rise, free from all evil, and go to your heavenly home. “Take heart, your sins are forgiven.” That is better news than any result of medical treatment, or positive prognosis, or recovery. Those are the words you should search out to hear and always find in this place. They are not empty words, that simply stay in the church, but have no impact in your life. The forgiveness of Jesus heals us, in our relationships, thoughts, and lives. It means that there will be healing from the sin and trouble that affects us each day. It means that Jesus’ words will give us strength to rise and go our ways and face the challenges in our lives and the sin we commit. And since we are broken in many ways and always in need of healing, let us urgently, barring no obstacle, seek out Christ’s forgiveness like the paralytic and his friends in true faith. Jesus, seeing our sin-wracked and faith-filled hearts, will always forgive. And so, we glorify God, who has given such grace to us.

In the name of the Father, and of the son, and of the Holy Spirit; Amen.