

Seventh Sunday in Epiphany  
February 23, 2003  
Mark 2:1-12

*Sermon by Pastor Paul Janke*

**Jesus Is the Great Physician of Soul and Body**

1. He shows that forgiveness is our greatest need
2. He shows that he has the authority to forgive

***NIV Mark 2:1 A few days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come home. 2 So many gathered that there was no room left, not even outside the door, and he preached the word to them. 3 Some men came, bringing to him a paralytic, carried by four of them. 4 Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus and, after digging through it, lowered the mat the paralyzed man was lying on. 5 When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven." 6 Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, 7 "Why does this fellow talk like that? He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?" 8 Immediately Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts, and he said to them, "Why are you thinking these things? 9 Which is easier: to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, take your mat and walk'? 10 But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins...." He said to the paralytic, 11 "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home." 12 He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all. This amazed everyone and they praised God, saying, "We have never seen anything like this!"***

Dear Christian Friends,

Your brother suddenly gets very sick one day. He's got flu-like symptoms, dizziness and weakness. He's barely able to walk and you know he needs help fast. You elect not to wait for an ambulance and take him to the hospital yourself. In the emergency room they tell you that you'll have to sit down and fill out the paperwork and that it may be a 5 or 6 hour wait before a doctor can see your brother. You don't have time for that. You take matters into your own hands. You push past the security guard and half carry, half drag your brother to the nearest open examining room. Then you go back into the hallway and you collar the nearest person who looks like a doctor. "Help him, now!" you shout. And the doctor does...what? Before he ever begins examining your brother, he looks him squarely in the eye and says, "Your sins are forgiven."

That wouldn't exactly be what you'd expect, would it? The conversation about spiritual things can take place later, you'd probably think. Right now there are pressing physical needs to be attended to. But that's essentially what Jesus did

in our Gospel lesson today in Mark 2. And there's something for us to learn from how Jesus handled things there. As he healed the paralyzed man, Jesus showed himself to be **The Great Physician of Soul and Body**. As we look carefully at what Jesus does there, we see that 1] he shows that forgiveness of sins is our greatest need, and 2] he shows that he has the authority to forgive sins.

### **1. He shows that forgiveness of sins is our greatest need**

Jesus has just come back to Capernaum, the city on the shore of the Sea of Galilee that served as the base of operations for this Galilean ministry. The crowds have caught up with him. Teachers of the law and Pharisees there from as far away as Jerusalem are gathered to listen as Jesus teaches the word. It's wall-to-wall people at the house where Jesus lives.

Five more men want to get in to see Jesus. Four of them are carrying the fifth man on stretcher. That man is paralyzed. Their intention is to bring the paralyzed man to see Jesus, but there's no parting this crowd. They can't even get in the door. So they leave. A little while later in the room where Jesus is teaching, you hear the pounding and scraping on the roof. Then dust and bits of hardened mud are falling from the ceiling. Pretty soon a hole opens in the ceiling and you can see daylight. The men on the roof keep working, digging and cutting through the roof until there's a good-sized opening. Then there's a pause and the next thing you see is that stretcher that they had been carrying is being let down by ropes from the roof until the paralyzed man on his stretcher is lying right in front of Jesus.

Give these fellows credit. This is one of the most dramatic, persistent, and literal instances of bringing someone to Jesus. I suppose if I had been in Jesus' place I might have said, "What are you doing? This isn't even my house!" But Jesus looked at this incident not as an unwelcome intrusion on his teaching or as gratuitous damage to his home. Jesus saw faith here, faith that wouldn't be denied a chance to bring a sick man to Jesus. And the Lord responded by meeting the paralyzed man's greatest need. He said to him, "*Son, your sins are forgiven.*"

What? Why is Jesus talking about sin and forgiveness at a time like this? This fellow is so sick that his friends in their frantic effort to save him have demolished the roof of Jesus' house in order to get him to Jesus and the first thing Jesus does is absolve the man of his sins? It hardly seems to be the appropriate response. But even more than this man needed to be able to walk again, he needed forgiveness for his sins, if he was desperately ill. For if he regained the ability to walk but had gotten no forgiveness, then he would have been healed only to rise and walk the rest of the way to eternal death. Like a skilled physician who speedily assesses the greatest need of his patient, Jesus evaluates this paralyzed man and makes his spiritual need his first priority.

We have all sorts of needs. At the most basic level we need food and clothing and shelter. Beyond that we have a need for security, for companionship, and a sense of our worth as human beings. Advertising agencies make it their mission to convince us that we have other needs as well—the need to drive a new car, the need to have pearly teeth, and drink a certain kind of soft drink. But none of these needs—even the most basic of them—can compare in importance to the need of possessing the forgiveness of the Almighty God. If all our other needs are met—and even our desires and whims were perfectly fulfilled—but on Judgment Day our record of sins stands intact to condemn us, then we are hopelessly and eternally lost.

That's why the discovery of the psalmist is such an important one for all of us to make and hold on to. The psalmist says to God, **"If you, O Lord, kept a record of sins, O LORD, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness; therefore you are feared."** (Ps. 130:4) When Jesus says to the paralyzed man, *"Son, your sins are forgiven,"* he uses the common New Testament word for forgiveness. It's the same word used to refer to the canceling of a debt. Behind our name in God's record book is written "Paid in full." How did that happen? It was certainly not because we were able to come up with enough of a payment to cover our debt. But Jesus did. There was nothing that needed forgiving in his life. He had no debt to cancel. But he assumed our debt. At his incarnation he had already signed on to transfer our sins to himself. Ultimately, he went to Calvary to furnish the payment that we could never muster: the sacrifice of a sinless life. With his priceless blood he paid for the sins of every person of every age and then shouted at the moment of his death: **"It is finished!"** "Paid in full!" The effect of this sacrifice by Jesus for our sake is that God now says to us, **"I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more."** (Is. 43:25) Isaiah's contemporary, the prophet Micah, closed his prophecy by expressing his wonder at the truth of God's forgiveness. He wrote, **"Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of your inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy. You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea."** (Micah 7:18-19) It was in view of his impending payment for sin that Jesus could say to the paralyzed man, "Your sins are forgiven." And it is in view of his finished sacrifice that Jesus says to each of us this morning, "Your sins are forgiven."

In Psalm 103 it says, **"Praise the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits—who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases."** (Ps. 103:2-3) The LORD does both. Jesus, our Lord, does both. He's the Great Physician of soul and body. But we see here that when Jesus said, "Your sins are forgiven," there were some there at his house who questioned whether Jesus should ever be able to say such words. They doubted that Jesus had the authority to make such a bold statement. As this account continues, Jesus

makes it clear that he is both the God who forgives our sins and heals our diseases. He shows that he has the authority to forgive sins.

## **2. He shows that he has the authority to forgive sins**

The teachers of the law who happened to be visiting when this paralyzed patient was lowered into the room were appalled by what they had just heard Jesus say—“Your sins are forgiven.” It says here, *“Now some of the teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, ‘Why does this fellow talk like that? He’s blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?’”* Forgiving sins was a divine prerogative, they believed. They were thinking of all those passages I just cited. It’s God who blots out our transgressions. No human has the right to do that. It’s God who removes our sins from us as far as east from west. God hurls that whole unsavory package into the depths of the sea and remembers them no more. But by what right does this carpenter’s son from nearby Nazareth forgive sins?

Jesus responds to their questions with a question of his own: *“Which is easier: to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven’ or to say, ‘Get up take your mat and walk?’”* The fact is that they’re equally difficult. To declare that a person’s sins are forgiven—and have that actually be the case—is a work that only God can do. And to say to a paralyzed man, “Get up, take your mat and walk”—well, that requires the power of God, too. Both of them are impossible for men.

But now comes the moment at which Jesus demonstrates his authority to forgive sins. He says to the paralytic, *“But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins...”* He said to the paralytic, *‘I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home’.* And he did. Mark says, *“He walked out in full view of them all.”* This was a stunning miracle then and it would be no less stunning today. Long-term paralysis is still for the most part beyond the ability of the most brilliant doctors to cure. Think of Christopher Reeve and tens of thousands of other paraplegics awaiting some advance in medical technology that will enable them to have their mobility back once again. But Jesus conquered all the physiological obstacles to enabling this paralyzed man to walk with just a command. There was no gradual strengthening of the paralyzed limbs. There were no painstaking months and years of recovery. Jesus said the word and the man got off the mat as if he’d just been resting there and walked home carrying his mat.

This miracle by itself said that Jesus possessed divine power to heal the sick. But in view of the preceding conversation about whether Jesus had the authority to forgive sins or whether he had been guilty of blasphemous statement, the verdict is clear: Jesus has the authority to forgive sins.

But you might be thinking, “Just a few minutes ago I heard Pastor Micheel say, “I forgive you all your sins.” Isn’t he actually guilty of the thing that the teachers of the law mistakenly thought Jesus was guilty of? But remember how he prefaced

what he said: "Therefore, as a called servant of Christ and *by his authority* I forgive you all your sins." The authority to forgive sins comes from Jesus. He gave that authority to his Christian Church when he said to his disciples, "**If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.**" (John 20:23) This gathering of Christians here at St. Peter authorized Pastor Micheel (and me) to announce this forgiveness of sins on your behalf when you called us to be your pastors. The authority to publicly proclaim the forgiveness of sins comes from Christ through his Church to those who are called to the various forms of the public ministry.

But you should know and rejoice in the fact that privately, as an individual Christian, you may also pronounce the forgiveness of sins to people. Our children have a need to hear us assure them, "Your sins are forgiven," particularly after we've disciplined them. Our spouses and other family members will benefit spiritually as we say to them, "Your sins are forgiven," when they've confessed their sins to us. A witnessing opportunity is really just an occasion to show people their sin and to show them their Savior by proclaiming God's law and gospel. And there, too, we as individuals have the authority to say to those who are stricken by the knowledge of their sins, "Your sins are forgiven (by God for Jesus' sake)." The truth is that this message of forgiveness in Jesus Christ is the great treasure of the Christian Church and God has given all of us a role to play in dispensing it.

Now as we leave that house in Capernaum where Jesus was living, there's a gaping hole in the roof and bits of wood and plaster all over the floor. But the man who was so dramatically let down for Jesus' attention no longer has a hole in his heart. He can move, he can walk. But more important than that, the joy of the forgiveness of sins has filled the gaping hole in his heart. May you, too, live each day in the joyful knowledge that by the saving work of Jesus Christ and by his authority, "Your sins are forgiven"! Amen.