

# Trinity 19

“Son, be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven you.”

I have often wondered how the paralytic felt about hearing these words.

Here he is--being carried around by his friends because his legs don't work.

His problem is so obvious that it shouldn't require any explanation.

They finally get him in to Jesus and He completely ignores his legs and forgives his sins.

If Jesus were a modern physician, he might be sued for medical malpractice.

To many, this is akin to going to the doctor to set a broken arm and, instead, receiving psychological counselling.

At least in today's Gospel, Jesus quickly corrects his mistake and also heals his paralysis.

But what about you?

How often have you brought your physical problems to Jesus and you still have them?

Sickness, injury, money problems, relationship problems etc.

We take these to the Lord in prayer and rarely, if ever do we see tangible results.

The illness continues to run its course, money doesn't fall from the sky, we continue to struggle in relationships--nothing seems to change at all.

Instead, when we come to church, we hear about the forgiveness of sins.

And so, we try to explain this away by inventing a popular piety which says such things as, "God always answers prayers, it's just that His answers are sometimes, 'No'."

But this explanation--although well-intentioned--is frankly wrong.

Jesus promises that "whatever we ask in His name, He will give it." No nos here.

So what are we to make of Jesus' answers to our prayers? What does He teach us through the paralytic?

First of all, Jesus plainly, teaches us to **value and cherish the absolution.**

The sentence, "You sins are forgiven you." Is supposed to make you "of good cheer."

It is not to be received like a package of socks or underwear at Christmas.

Such things are received with a cheerless thanks as common necessities but not special.

Likewise, the sheer availability of the forgiveness of sins detracts from its worth.

We apply the law of supply and demand to our life and observe that forgiveness is spoken at Church every Sunday but elk season comes only once a year.

So which is more valuable?

We observe that the Lord's Supper is served every week but out-of-town relatives come only occasionally. So which is worth more?

Some churches, in an effort to combat these ungodly valuations, make forgiveness harder to get. You have to "get it the old fashioned way--you earn it." (By faith or by works)

But Jesus doesn't do this. The paralytic doesn't have to do a jig in order to get forgiven.

Nor, even, does he first have to believe. The text speaks of "their faith" not "his"!

We do not value the absolution because of the price we must pay for it.

We value it because of the price that the Son of God paid for it.

The second thing that Jesus teaches through the paralytic it this: **The forgiveness of sins is the real answer to your every prayer.**

In forgiving the sins of the paralytic, Jesus was not temporarily ignoring his paralysis.

Rather, He was addressing its deepest cause and healing from the inside out.

So also with you. When Jesus lets your problems continue for a time while forgiving your sins, He is not cherry-picking your prayers to address only some of them.

Rather, He is addressing the very troubles that you have laid before Him.

...Addressing them from the roots up.

No matter what problems you may have, sins are always the real problem.

They are not simply another problem that you have in addition to all the rest.

Truly, sin is your **only** problem. When this goes away, all its symptoms will vanish as well.

Adam and Eve did not have money problems before they fell.

Nor did they have health problems, relationship problems or any anxiety.

Sin caused the world to come crashing down on them and also on us.

That is why church is about the forgiveness of sins.

We do not exist to hand out money to the poor or justice to the downtrodden.

Having money and justice you can still be damned.

The church does not exist to fix relationships nor, even, to combat addictions.

Happy couples still go to hell and sobriety in itself does not save anyone.

And so, it is no accident that repentance and absolution are central to everything we do.

The life of a Christian is all about the forgiveness of sins.

And if you have a problem--any problem whatsoever--until you have related it to your sin and your need of forgiveness, you haven't yet understood your real need.

And so, you are called to a life of self-examination and repentance.

So that you might understand your truest needs and so that you might value ever more greatly the absolution that Jesus speaks to you.

But also know this: Jesus doesn't depend on your understanding before He can help.

Before the paralytic understood the connection between sins and paralysis, Jesus was addressing it.

Before you ever heard this sermon, Jesus was dying for your sins.

While you spend your energy and money on caring for your health and retirement, your house and your relationships, your self-fulfillment and recreation...

Jesus is spilling His life-blood to forgive your sins.

Jesus took your problems and bore them on His shoulders to the cross.

Because the paralytic's feet would not walk, Jesus' own were pierced by nails.

Because your money has been ill-spent, Jesus had everything taken away from Him.

Because your relationships are broken and strained, Jesus was forsaken by the Father.

And "*by His stripes, we are healed.*"

This is all great news! But there is still more.

The crowd watching Jesus noted what He did and declared what it means.

*"Now when the multitudes saw it, they marveled and glorified God who had given such power to men."*

The power to forgive sins did not die when Jesus died. For He rose again.

The power to forgive sins did not ascend to heaven when Jesus ascended to heaven.

For Jesus gave it to men.

He breathed on His disciples and said unto them, "Whosoever sins you forgive, they are forgiven and whosoever sins you retain they are retained." (John 20)

With these words Jesus made His Church on earth the forgiveness place.

Now God is glorified still because He has given such power to men.

Now, when you hear the called and ordained servant of the word announce the forgiveness of your sins, you can know and believe that by these words, your sins are forgiven.

The paralytic has nothing on you.

For you too have Christ come to you to address your every need. AMEN