

Read also Isaiah 55:6-13. Check out the service, which is recorded on www.fpcd.org. The Scriptures and the music in the service support and illumine the message of this sermon.

Janet Stahl just told us the story and I think she captured the drama. It was no ordinary day for a paralyzed man and his four friends, not to mention everyone who was gathered at Jesus' home that day. Can you imagine what it was like, going to the home of Jesus? That would be my dream! Can you imagine inviting people over for Bible study and prayer and it being that crowded?

The Word is very fruitful. And Jesus is primarily a teacher of the Word. Did you hear the Isaiah scripture?

“Snow and rain cause the grain to grow, producing seed for the farmer and bread for the hungry. It is the same with my word. I send it out, and it always produces fruit. It will accomplish all I want it to, and it will prosper everywhere I send it” (Isa 55:10-11).

But while Jesus is teaching the Word, dirt starts falling from the ceiling. More and more. Can you imagine? The room gets lighter, as sunlight streams through the hole – large enough to lower a man and a stretcher. He gazes up at four sweaty, dirty, intent faces looking down in triumph, and expectation.

I can imagine you men doing that – on a mission – mission accomplished! Jesus called it faith. Faith is not some theoretical thing – it's doing something. What they did moved Jesus. He turned from His teaching, looked at the man, and blurted out,

“Son, your sins are forgiven!” (v. 5)

Can you imagine the paralyzed man? He was probably a little nervous as it was, having never been lowered through a roof before.

SINS??? What do my sins have to do with this? In front of all these people???

Besides, I don't care about that. Can't you see my problem is *I'm paralyzed???*

But Jesus truly can see the problem.

Imagine the paralyzed man's daily thoughts. *If only I could walk I'd be whole and my problems would disappear.*

But if that were the case, everyone standing on two legs would be problem-free.

Or you might think, *if only I won the lottery and could buy what I want. I'd be happy.*

Are all rich people happy?

If only I had fame or that job I want or status, others would look up to me, admire me, and I would be important. Life would be a breeze.

If only I had a beautiful wife or rich husband. Everyone would be jealous and I would reach success, all my problems melting away.

Do famous, successful people have it all together? Certainly they may have money and recognition but is what they have the answer to life's struggles?

A few years ago there was a movie called "The Aviator," the story of a rich, successful, famous man for whom the sky was the limit.

Howard Hughes inherited a small fortune from his father when he was eighteen. He quickly moved to Los Angeles to become a Hollywood film producer, producing many famous movies, and eventually owning RKO Pictures. At the same time, he branched into other industries, including aviation and defense. He purchased majority interest in what became TWA and was absolutely intent on being the top and best. He received many awards for his accomplishments.

In the meantime, though married he became openly involved with numerous starlets. Over time, wanting more and more, he grew more and more emotionally and socially unstable, trusting no one and unable to function, until he finally became completely reclusive. Though one of the richest men in the world, he died of mal-nutrition.

I'm sure you can think of other celebrities who have sought fulfillment in all the wrong places, with their own tragic results.

But Jesus knows that there is more in life, and he drives all of us to look for that greater thing. For being forgiven, finding God, changing your chief focus from things that do not satisfy and being reconciled into a loving relationship with God through Christ is the thing that will truly provide the love and security you desire.

And so Jesus said, in essence, *paralysis is a problem, but if I fix that, while ignoring the other, you will be ultimately disappointed.*

Elsewhere Jesus tells us, "What do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul? Is anything worth more than your soul? (Mk 8:36-37)

So Jesus said to the man, "Son, your sins are forgiven."

We find our soul through Jesus and His forgiveness.

This caught the scribes (who were the religious leaders) completely off guard. The hair was raised on the back of their necks. *This is blasphemy. Only God can forgive sins.* To them, Jesus was just a man. It was just the beginning of Jesus' ministry and Jesus was just beginning to be revealed as Messiah.

But for them and for us to know God, you have to look for where God reveals Himself. The first revelation that pointed to Jesus' identity as the Son of God is that Jesus was able to see and address the questions of doubt in their hearts.

And, Jesus engaged the doubt.

Do you doubt? It is okay to doubt and question, in fact, it is necessary. So never back away from your questions. To Jesus, they are legitimate and He willingly engages them. The question is, will you hang with Him and let Him lead you to the truth? Will you open your mind to faith and seek His answers? For those who seek will find.

The four friends and the paralyzed man knew nothing more about Jesus than rumors, and yet in faith they went to Him. Jesus was very impressed with their faith. That precipitated the man's forgiveness.

With Jesus you ALWAYS get more than you bargained for; for when you truly seek Him you find Him. Paul put it this way: He is "able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine" (Eph. 3:20).

Jesus first gave the man the gift of forgiveness.

How do you gain forgiveness? Is it by trying your hardest to live right and do the right thing? Is it by making some sacrifice? No. Jesus offers forgiveness to everyone who comes to Him in faith. Jesus has that authority and faith is the key: You must have the faith to approach Him.

Then He first, before anything else, forgives us because that is the first, most important thing. For in that gift, we are truly set free.

Then, after forgiving the man, Jesus turned His attention to the scribes' question, "How can this fellow forgive sins? Only God alone can forgive sins."

Jesus counters their question with a question: "Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Stand up and take your mat and walk'?" (v. 9)

Which do you think is easier? If you can answer, you will be doing theologians a favor, for many puzzle over Jesus' statement to this day. Obviously, healing a man's paralysis is verifiable, but whether someone is forgiven is unseen. You might think, healing is impossible, but forgiveness is easy.

Yet for Jesus, healing is easy. But forgiveness will be immeasurably more difficult. It will take His going to the cross to accomplish forgiveness. So Jesus' death on the cross is foreshadowed right here, from the second chapter of Mark, and He shows us the great need for forgiveness.

Reading miraculous accounts of healing always raise the "buts" and the "whys" for us – "but what about my relative, or friend who was not healed?" Joni Earekson Tada at age eighteen had a diving accident in which she broke her neck. Paralyzed, she was full of darkness, despair, hurt and pain. She wanted to die. As she and her friends prayed and God did not heal her physically, she was in a crisis of faith. Her friend said, "This is what God has for you." So Joni began to accept it.

As she did so, she began to see that handicaps happen in all arenas of people's lives, and they are not just physical. And she began to experience Jesus as real, as He awakened her spiritually. She gave herself fully to Him, believing that He could overcome her depression and make something

of her. And God has accomplished more than she could have ever imagined in her ministry as an advocate for disabled people. She has authored 48 books; founded the Joni and Friends International Disability Center, Wheels for the World which has distributed over 8,000 wheelchairs in the name of Christ, has been appointed to the Disability Advisory Committee of the U.S. State Department, and has received numerous other awards.

She has gained worldwide fame, but fame is not what fills her life – Jesus is. If she had gotten up and walked, she would have never done any of those healing things for millions of people. Sometimes Jesus goes deeper than the physical, and uses disabilities to accomplish greater healing, which we gain when we trust Him.

But in this story, Jesus did heal the paralyzed man, to everyone’s amazement. Sometimes miracles happen and they validate the glory of God. Just in the last year we in this congregation literally saw a little boy get up and walk after being so terribly injured in a three-story fall. I watched him take his first steps myself. It was as if something was driving him to get better and recover. Later he prayed with his therapist and said, “Jesus thank you for taking care of me.”

And, you know those two little sixteen-month-old twin boys who are part of our congregation? They are equally little miracles, as at twenty weeks, their mother went into pre-mature labor with a condition which babies do not often survive.

We must never forget that miracles do happen, just like the New Testament believers experienced. But we must also understand and embrace the greater healing – the deeper healing of forgiveness that gives us the health of the soul. For it means everything to gain your soul.

Today, remember this beautiful story not as a dream or something that you won’t ever see, but as a reality which points you to two great healings. Everyone in this room can find the greater healing – the one that was truly, immeasurably harder for Jesus to accomplish, but one that He freely offers today.

Embrace His forgiveness, and receive the healing that really matters.

AMEN