

Mark 2:1-12

There were many people who purchased a lottery ticket last week. Their hope was to win the \$365 million jackpot. We could all dream of what we would do with that much money, but may God be merciful to us in never allowing us to win such a thing. You heard right—may God spare us by not ever allowing us to win such a jackpot. It would ruin us. Oh, we would surely enjoy life to the full, but what a spiritual ruin that would be. “To gain the whole world and yet lose one’s soul” is not worth it. To suddenly come into riches beyond our wildest dreams is something that not one of us could handle—and how great the temptation would then be to put our trust in what we have, and not completely in our gracious God.

Winning the lottery may be what our sinful flesh wants, but God gives us what we need. Day after day He gives us what we need for both body and soul. We gripe and complain because we don’t get what we want, but even that is a blessing. For if God were to treat us as spoiled children—giving us always what we wanted, then we would soon lose our love and trust in Him. But God did not teach us to pray, “Let my will be done,” but rather, “Thy will be done.” In other words, “Lord, give me not what I want, but only what You believe I truly need.” And this thought leads us to our text for today, in Mark, the second chapter.

One day, we’re told, four men were walking along the streets of Capernaum. They were on a mission. They were carrying a stretcher. Lying on the stretcher was their friend. He was a paralytic. He could not walk because one or both of his legs were paralyzed. His four friends were carrying him to Jesus. They knew that Jesus could heal him. They had faith. Where doctors had failed, they knew Jesus would succeed. And so they march along the streets heading for the house where Jesus is teaching. When they arrive they discover a challenge. The house is packed full with people. The fire marshal must have been on vacation. No one could enter through the door for people were wedged in like sardines in a can.

Now these were true friends. They had not come this far to walk away in defeat. They were determined to bring their friend to Jesus. And so they go up on top of the roof and start digging. Roofs were flat in those parts of the world, and they weren’t covered with wood and shingles. They were covered with tiles, and straw, and clay, or other types of insulation. Having made an opening, these four men slowly and carefully lower their friend down to where Jesus is. Imagine their relief when Jesus interrupts His teaching and takes notice of their sick friend. Now he will receive the healing they so desperately want for him.

But their thoughts are not Jesus’ thoughts. Instead, He tells the paralytic, “My son, your sins are forgiven.” I wonder if these four men didn’t almost drop the ropes to the stretcher in surprise. “Forgiveness? But we brought him here to be healed!” They had not gone to all this trouble just so that their friend could receive forgiveness.

Sounds just like us, doesn’t it? Do we jump out of bed on Sunday mornings and go to all sorts of trouble to come to this House just because Jesus is here in Word and Sacrament forgiving sins? If we knew...if all of us really knew what an absolute treasure is ours in the forgiving of our sins, we would have to change the shape of our roof. We’d have to make it flat so that people could open it up on Sunday mornings to bring themselves and their

children down here, because no one could enter in through the door—it would be too crowded. But sadly this is not so. We don't think we need forgiveness all that much. That's why there's always plenty of room here—plenty of room for one more sinner to receive the greatest gift God can give—the forgiveness of sins in Jesus Christ the Savior.

Jesus did not give that man what he wanted, did He? At least, not at first. But He did give him what he needed. Now don't think that He was playing games with this poor man. He saw the condition he was in. He knew he was unable to walk. He wasn't teasing him by ignoring the obvious. Rather, Jesus looked past the obvious to the “not so obvious” within that man's heart. Paralysis is a symptom. The disease is sin. The man was a paralytic because he was a sinner. The sin within our heart shows itself in different ways. It causes sickness, paralysis, cancer, heart disease. It produces loneliness, troubles, sorrow. It erupts in jealousy, lust, greed, covetousness, and death. Jesus wasn't ignoring what the man wanted—He gave him what He needed—He forgave his sin. Paralysis does not close the door to heaven—sin does. Cancer cannot keep us from Jesus, but unforgiven sin will. A heart attack may result in death, but sin not forgiven, results in eternal death in hell. We may care about satisfying the wants of our body, but Jesus puts first the needs of our soul. This is not to say that He cares nothing about our physical problems. “Rise,” He also said to the paralytic, “Take up your bed and go to your house.” Jesus gave that man the healing he wanted, but not before He gave him the forgiveness he needed.

What do you want? And what do you need? Are you wanting a healthier marriage? Are you desiring peace in a relationship that has become strained? Are you wanting a cure for a sickness—for yourself, or for a loved one? Do you have sleepless nights? Are you suffering from depression or loneliness? Are you wanting relief and peace of mind? Are you needing to make more money? Is that why you are here this morning? Did you come to God's House so He will fix your trouble?

You and I are just like that paralytic. As he was brought to Jesus, so we are here in the presence of Christ. He is here in His Word and in His Sacraments. What do we want from Jesus? But more importantly, what do we need? The paralytic wanted to be healed of his paralysis. We, too, have troubles that we want Jesus to help us with. Jesus knows what we need, and that's why you hear the same words in His House that the paralytic heard—“Your sins are forgiven.”

Jesus did, and does, have the authority on earth to forgive sins, for He is God. And He speaks that same authoritative word of pardon today through His pastors—His called servants. The forgiveness of sins which you and I so desperately need is yours. Be assured of this. Jesus backed up His words by laying down His life for us on the cross. His word to you, “I forgive you of your sins,” does what it says—it forgives you, because He suffered, died, and rose again to give His words the power and authority they have.

And because your sins are forgiven, nothing can keep you from heaven. Eternal life belongs to you in Christ, right now. As you come up to receive the Lord's body and blood in the bread and wine, Jesus assures you that you have this life in Him. “I am the Bread of Life,” He says, “He who eats of Me shall live because of Me.”

Because the disease of sin in your heart is cleansed, all of the symptoms of sin can cause you no harm. Cancer took my father from me 33 years ago last night, but cancer is only a

symptom of sin. It can kill the body, yes, but it cannot destroy the soul. My dad, like your loved ones who died in Christ, live in heaven, for their sin is forgiven.

Whatever sickness sin brings to you, it may be troublesome for a time, but it cannot ever keep you from your Lord. Whatever troubles you are enduring—troubles with another person, troubles within your own heart and mind, financial, emotional—these come because we are sinners living in a sinful world. But with your sin forgiven, all these troubles, while making life difficult, cannot rob you of the joy of knowing where you and I are heading—to heaven through Jesus Christ.

Now perhaps the Lord Jesus will not only give you what you need, but also what you want. After forgiving the paralytic, He healed his sickness. Do you have a sickness? Do you have a physical or emotional problem? Do you have a troubled relationship? The Lord may choose to bring healing to you also. But that's for the Lord to decide—not me, not you. “Thy will, not mine, be done,” we pray. He can fix the troubles in your life if He wants to. And at times He does choose to do so, in His own time and according to what He knows is best for us.

Bring your wants to Jesus, as the four men did with their friend. But do not, ever, let your wants blind your eyes to what you need. Jesus may give you what you want, but more importantly, He will give you, and does give you through His Word and Sacraments, what you need—He forgives your sins, and gives you all the rich blessings that come with it, even heaven itself. Amen.