

Mark 1:29-39

Do you ever recall when you were sick, perhaps in a hospital bed, your doctor coming in and saying, "I forgive you?" Think hard. Perhaps he said, "I forgive your illness," or something like that. No? I didn't think so. Yet this is precisely what Jesus did with Simon Peter's mother-in-law. He forgave her fever.

She had missed church that morning--the service where Jesus cast the demon out of the possessed man--so Simon Peter brought Jesus to his home where his wife's mother was very sick. St. Mark tells us that they told Jesus about her as soon as they walked into the house. He came to her bedside--and this is where the Greek is helpful. The English translation reads: "*He took her by the hand and lifted her up,*" but the word in Greek for lifting her up is the same word that means to forgive. Our text literally reads: "*He took her by the hand and forgave her.*" He lifted her up out of her fever, out of her bed of sickness.

What a great way to look at this. We think about being forgiven of our sin, but not of our sicknesses. Yet, sin and sickness, as well as troubles and even death all belong together. They're cousins, even brothers. In heaven we will be free of all these, but here in our fallen world we struggle against all of them. Jesus faced and conquered them all for you. "*He took our sicknesses and bore our diseases,*" writes the Prophet Isaiah.

Yes, Jesus carried your sin to the cross. And because you are forgiven of your sin, you no longer fear sin's cousins. Sickness and disease, trouble and death constantly plague us. But they are arrows whose sharp points have been cut off. We will rise from death in the end, and even now, Jesus raises us up out of our troubles, out of our sicknesses, out of our sins.

Now wouldn't it have been something if Peter's mother-in-law had told Jesus, "Thanks, but no thanks." "Thanks for offering to lift me up out of my fever, but I'd prefer to just lay here in bed sick for a while." That's the last thing she would have said! But it, sometimes, is the first thing we say.

When Jesus lifted her up out of her fever, Peter's mother-in-law could not hang on to it anymore. Even if she had wanted to--as absurd as that thought is--her fever was gone, forgiven; it was no longer with her. But when Jesus lifts us up out of our sins, we're not so sure we want to let go of them. We kind of like being sick...with sin. We like using foul language now and then. There are certain people we don't want to forgive; we like holding on to our anger. We don't like to obey our parents all the time. Is it necessary for me to continue? Everyone of us has those pet sins in our life which we kind of enjoy keeping around as pets. We really don't want to let go of them.

But that's why this story in St. Mark is helpful. We need to start seeing our sins the way that we see our sicknesses. Who of us would want to go through life day after day with a severe fever that never goes away? None of us. Not long ago, there was a man in the Washington, Missouri area who took his own life because he had such severe neck pain that it was unbearable for him, and the doctors said there was nothing they could do for him. Had Jesus come to that man's bedside and offered to lift him up out of his pain, would that man have turned Him away?

Then why do we? Why do we come here to church to be lifted up out of our sins, only to go right back to them? Don't we want to be free of our sins the way Peter's mother-in-law was free of her fever? Because only then are we useful to the Lord. Mark tells us that after she was free of her fever, Peter's mother-in-law began to serve them. But not before. Lying in bed sick with a fever, there was nothing she could do to serve Jesus and her family.

And so today, you who are God's servants are here in His hospital. Think of the pew as your hospital bed. You are here in your sick bed, and some of you actually do have illness and disease in your body. All of us struggle with troubles. All of us face, and will face death. All of us are burdened down with sin and guilt. Do you want

to be lifted up out of these? Do you confess that you need God's help to keep from falling back into sin? Do you desire, by God's strength, to amend your sinful life?

I am not the Great Physician, but I stand here in His place and by His authority to speak His word to you. You are forgiven of all your sins. God forgives each and every one of you. Through this word of forgiveness, Jesus lifts you up out of your sins. You are free of them because Jesus carried them away for you. He bore your sin on the cross. He bore your sin, He carried your sicknesses, He died your death. Jesus has freed you to live as His servant. Now you, like Peter's mother-in-law, are able by His strength, to serve your Lord and your neighbor.

There is nothing for you to do other than to freely serve. Peter's mother-in-law did absolutely nothing to help Jesus lift her out of her fever. All she could do was lie sick in bed. Jesus did it all for her. He lifted her up completely on His own. She contributed nothing.

And so for you. There is nothing you did, nothing you need to do, nothing that you can do, to make yourself any more forgiven. It's all Jesus. God forgives you completely only for the sake of your Savior.

Now if you came in here today with disease in your body, do not go to your doctor tomorrow expecting the disease to be gone. What is gone is the burden of wondering if your disease is a punishment from God. It's not. Jesus took your punishment for you. Sin and its cousins still plague you in your life, but their sharp teeth have been removed. You are forgiven. Jesus has lifted you up out of your sin, and out of the brothers and cousins of sin.

You will continue to sin because you and I are weak in our flesh. We commit sins of weakness even though we do not want to. We will still become sick even though we do not want to. We will still face troubles. And we will die. But none of these can separate you from God. Jesus has lifted you out of them all, and raised you up to live with Him as a member of His family. He claims you despite your sinfulness. He does not punish you with sickness and trouble. Rather, through all these problems, He cares for you. And He will not let death keep you. He will raise your mortal body in the end.

All this love and mercy is connected to your baptism. When you were baptized, Jesus did for you what He did for Peter's mother-in-law. He lifted you up out of your sin, out of Satan's hold on you, out of death into life. And you have been in Jesus' loving arms ever since. This morning you saw this take place right here in Jesus' hospital as He lifted the Pineda family out of their sins, out of death, forgiving them and giving them life, making them members of His dear family--the same thing He did for each one of you in your baptism.

Friends, we cannot...we cannot ever lift ourselves up out of our sins. Peter's mother-in-law could only lie there sick until Jesus came to her. And we would lie helpless just like her unless He came to us. Thank God for our baptism. And thank God for His Holy Supper and His words of life in the Gospel. For through these, Jesus keeps coming to your sickbed. He keeps forgiving you. He keeps lifting you up, because again and again we fall. How we need Jesus' hospital! Not just on the day we were baptized, but throughout our life. How we need Jesus! And how good, therefore, that you have Him...that He has you in His arms. Amen.