

Jesus gives the paralyzed man what he needs most, and he heals his deepest wounds. "**Friend, your sins are forgiven,**" he says. The Pharisees and teachers of the law, who are Johnnie-on-the-spot, start to grumble. "That's not kosher. Even a rookie Jew knows, '**Who can forgive sins but God alone?**'" Jesus knows their internal grumbling, and it spawns one of his greatest questions: "**Which is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk?'**" Since it's Jesus who's asking the question, you answer it. Both are difficult, to be sure, but which is easier for Jesus? To forgive a soul or to heal a body? Let's ask it a different way: Which caused Jesus less pain—giving this man health or gaining heaven for him?

To heal this man's body took a simple command; to forgive his sins required Jesus' blood. The first was done in a house surrounded by friends; the second took place on a hill in the company of thieves. One took a word; the other took his body. One took a moment; the other took his life—33 years of his active and passive obedience, always doing his heavenly Father's will, and then taking all our selfishness and sin, our misguided priorities and messed-up lives, our shame and our guilt, all of it—to the cross and suffering and dying for it there. "*Not with gold or silver, Martin Luther writes, "but with his holy, precious blood and with his innocent suffering and death."*" So, let me ask it again: Which one was easier?

You see, so strong was Jesus' love for these men and their paralyzed friend that he went far above and beyond their request and went all the way to the cross. Jesus already knew the cost of grace. He already knew the price of forgiveness: His body, his blood; his life, his death. But he gave it anyway, didn't he? Love burst his heart.

And nothing has changed. What happened way back then still happens today. Jesus is still the Friend of all. He still heals our deepest wounds, the wounds caused by our sin. He looks us in the eye and lets his love burst. He says, "**Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am humble and gentle in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light**" (Mt 11:28-30). May Jesus' love fill your hearts with a love for him and a love for those he came to save! He is a Friend to all. Amen.

#### **Luke 5:17-26 – Jesus, Friend to All – 82, 471, 304, 311**

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Have you ever heard the word *loveburst*? It's defined as spontaneous affection; a tender moment of radiant love; ignited devotion; an explosion of tenderness. Let me illustrate.

[Share story of Sue teaching women's Bible class at school.] That's a loveburst. Here's another story. He came home cranky because a deadline got moved up. She came home grumpy because Kinder Care forgot to give their five-year-old her throat medicine. Each wanted a little sympathy from the other, but neither got any. So there they sat at the supper table—cranky and grumpy—with little Emily. Emily folds her hands to pray (as she has been taught), and the two of them bow their heads (but not their hearts) and listen. "Hello, God. It's Emily. How are you? I'm fine, thank you. Mom and Dad are mad. I don't know why, but could you make them stop? Please do, or it's just going to be you and me having any fun tonight. Amen." The prayer is answered before it's finished. Mom and Dad look at each other in the middle and laugh with each other at the end. They nod their heads and say they're sorry. And they both thank God for the little voice that reminded them about what matters. That's what lovebursts do. They remind us of what matters.

In our Gospel text today we experience a loveburst from Jesus. We're given a divine reminder that what we have is greater than what we want and that what is urgent is not always what really matters. Fellow redeemed, Jesus truly is the Friend of all.

#### **Jesus Heals the Deepest Wounds**

- 1. What we hope for is temporal healing.**
- 2. What we are blessed with is spiritual healing.**

1. Luke informs us that Jesus encountered a man who was paralyzed, a man who couldn't walk, who couldn't stand. His limbs were bent and his body twisted. Perhaps he was palsied, that is, his body had been ridden with disease from the day of his birth. Maybe he had once been healthy and had been injured in an accident or a fall. Whether he was born paralyzed or became a paralytic really makes no difference; the end result was the same. He was totally dependent on others. Someone had to wash his face and bathe his body. He couldn't comb his hair or tie his sandals. When he ran, it was only in his dreams, from which he would always awaken to the same old broken body that couldn't roll over or readjust or respond to reveille.

Any one of us in our right mind would say, "What he needs is a new body," right? What he needs is a God who'll restore what tragedy has robbed from him. He needs arms that swing, hands that grip, feet that dance. When the people of his day looked at him, they didn't see the man; they saw a body in need of a miracle, a big miracle. That's certainly what his buddies saw. So they did what any one of us would do for a friend. They decided to get him some help.

Word was out that Jesus, the miracle-worker, was in town. Last week we heard how Jesus had healed a man who was covered with leprosy. And, as word got out, the people came; they came from everywhere. Luke says they came "*from every village of Galilee and from Judea and Jerusalem.*" We might say they came from Muskego and from New Berlin and from Big Bend. Everyone, so it seemed, had come to see if this Jesus was real or right or both.

Luke tells us that, by the time the man's friends arrived, the house where Jesus was staying was full, and there was no way in because of the crowd. How would this small band of men ever get Jesus' attention? What good would they be to their paralyzed friend if they couldn't gain an audience with the miracle-worker? It was decision-making time. They had to make a choice. Do they give up or go in?

*"When they could not find a way to do this because of the crowd,"* our text reads, *"they went up on the roof and lowered him on his mat through the tiles into the middle of the crowd, right in front of Jesus."*

Pulling back a part of the loosely constructed flat roof, they positioned their friend directly in front of Jesus. This was risky business—they could fall. It was dangerous business—he could fall. It was unorthodox—de-roofing is anti-social. And it was intrusive—Jesus was busy. But it was their only chance to get their friend to Jesus. So they ignored what was risky and dangerous, what was unorthodox and intrusive, and they did what they had to do.

Faith does that, doesn't it? Faith does the unexpected. It does what's risky and dangerous. It gets a little unorthodox at times, and it doesn't mind being a little intrusive. And faith gets Jesus' attention. Jesus says, *"Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you."* (Lk 11:9). Through the psalmist he says, *"Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honor me"* (Ps 50:15). How many times in the Gospels doesn't Jesus express his utter amazement and joy at someone who has great faith? Today Luke says, *"When Jesus saw their faith, he said, 'Friend, your sins are forgiven.'*"

Think of it. These men had enough hope in Jesus and love for their friend that they were willing to take a chance. They were willing to risk embarrassment and injury for a few precious moments in the presence of the Friend of sinners.

And Jesus was moved. As I was when I heard Sue's words. As the parents were when they heard the prayer of their little girl, Emily. Jesus was moved by this expression of faith. And he applauds—maybe not with his hands but certainly with his heart. And he doesn't only applaud, he blesses. And you and I get to see a divine loveburst.

2. This man's buddies have brought him to Jesus to be healed, but Jesus won't settle for a simple healing of his body; he wants to heal his soul. He leapfrogs over the physical and deals with the spiritual. This shouldn't surprise us about Jesus. For when he taught his disciples to pray the Lord's Prayer, he showed them how important it is to keep our priorities straight—six requests for spiritual blessings versus one for physical: *"Give us each day our daily bread"* (Lk 11:3). When he hung on the cross and uttered his seven last words, six were filled with spiritual meaning and only one with physical: *"I am thirsty"* (Jn 19:28), and even that was in fulfillment of prophecy. While our body's health is important, it's only temporal; our soul is immortal. *"What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?"* Jesus once asked. *"Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?"* (Mk 8:36, 37)

The man's friends want Jesus to heal their friend in his body, but Jesus sets the bar higher and heals the man's soul. They expect Jesus to say, "I heal you," but he says, "I forgive you." How incredible is that! Sometimes Jesus is so touched by what he sees that he gives us what we need and not simply what we ask for.

And that's a good thing, too. For who of us would ever have thought to ask God for what he freely gives? Who of us would have dared to say, "God, would you please hang yourself on a cross and then go to hell to pay for every sin I have ever committed? And then have the arrogance to add, "And after you forgive me, could you prepare a place in heaven where I could live forever?" And if that wasn't enough: "Oh, and would you please stay with me and protect me and guide me and bless me with more than I could ever ask for or imagine—or deserve?" No, we tend to ask God for relatively little things, things like health and a good job and a long life. Grandiose requests from our perspective, to be sure, but from God's point of view, it's sort of like asking for the moped when he offers us the limo.