

Text: Matthew 9:2-8.

Friendship Sunday.

August 16, 2020.

Friend, your sins are forgiven. Amen.

What's the best thing a friend could say to you? What would be the greatest thing you could hear? The test came back. "The results were negative! You got the job! Yes! She said yes!" But what if you and that friend are on the outs? What if you did something stupid? Once I was picking up our oldest son at a friend's house. Wintertime, snow was piled up at the edge of the driveway, barely enough room even for a Honda Civic to get through. I tapped the snow bank. Snow is soft right? Well, not this snow. Big gash in the bumper. My wife's first words, from the passenger seat? "I forgive you." I forgive you. Best words you can ever hear. I forgive you. Your sins are forgiven. What would ever be better news? Your sins are forgiven. What could be more lasting news? Your sins are forgiven. The first, best, most important thing Jesus says, "Friend, your sins are forgiven!"

Let's set the scene here. Jesus is teaching a crowd of people. They are all in a house, not practicing social distancing, packed in so tightly, no one else can enter. There's a paralyzed man. He and his friends have heard about Jesus. They have faith Jesus can heal their friend. They don't give up when the house is full. They find a way around the obstacle and since they couldn't get inside from the inside, they go outside, up on the roof and remove a portion of the flat roof and lower their friend to Jesus, their paralyzed friend to Jesus.

How do you think this paralyzed friend feels? He's used to being the center of attention for all the wrong reasons. How many stares has he endured? How many times have eyes filled with pity glanced on him quickly, then looked away, only after realizing they had been looking too long? How does this man feel about himself? Why me? What did I do to deserve this? Why am I paralyzed? Am I a worse sinner? Did I do something awful? Do you have those same thoughts? Do you feel your sin so deeply it paralyzes your soul? Do you wonder, "What did I do to deserve these cataracts, this cancer, this coronavirus?" Why me? What did I do?

What's Jesus going to say? What lesson will the great teacher teach? Here's a man with a bigger problem than cataracts or cancer or coronavirus. This man's problem is paralysis! But Jesus saw this man's problem was greater than that. This man's biggest problem was sin. So the first thing, the greatest thing, the most important thing Jesus said! "Take heart, son, your sins are forgiven!" Take heart son, your sins are forgiven! Jesus says the same thing to you, right here, right now. Take heart son! Have courage daughter! Your sins are forgiven. Your sins are forgiven! Yours and yours and yours and yours and yours and yours! Your sins are forgiven!

Keep on taking heart. Take heart over and over. Be courageous. Be firm in difficult circumstances. Have confidence in the face of the most severe testing. Take heart! Your sins are forgiven. The word for son here is the word of tender affection a parent has for a child. The word that a parent will do anything for this child. When this same account is recorded in another book of the Bible, the book of Luke, Jesus addresses the man as friend! You are my friend! You are my child! I will do anything for you. And Jesus did the greatest thing for you. He died for you. He gave his life for you. Jesus himself said, "Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends."

My friends, Jesus laid down his life for you! That's why your sins are forgiven. Even the way Jesus said those words, "Your sins are forgiven," fills us with confidence. Forgive is in the passive. That means

someone else does the forgiving. Jesus doesn't say, "Forgive yourself," as though it's up to you to feel forgiven. Jesus says, "I did it. Your sins are forgiven. I declare it. Your sins are forgiven. There is no doubt. Your sins are forgiven." And it's a present tense, meaning this forgiveness is repeated over and over, always in the present. Right now, your sins are forgiven. When you sin later today, your sins are still forgiven. When you do that really stupid thing next week, your sins are still forgiven. First thing Jesus said. Your sins are forgiven. Greatest thing Jesus said. Your sins are forgiven. Best words ever spoken? Take heart, son, your sins are forgiven.

If only everyone in the crowd saw it that way. Some reflected and started thinking this evil thought. "Who's this fellow?" They can't even bear to think Jesus' name. "He's blaspheming. He's taking the place of God. He's calling himself God. He's dissing God by doing something only God can do: forgive sins." Notice, before they say anything, while this is only in their thoughts, Jesus knows and Jesus speaks. Maybe the critic will say, "You could see it on their faces. This is the most obvious thought to have. Some guy announces, 'Your sins are forgiven'? That's easy to say. Back it up." But shouldn't this have proved, "Jesus really is God? Jesus knows what I am thinking? Maybe I should at least be curious before being critical."

Jesus anticipates perfectly and raises an amazing question. "Which is easier? To say, 'Your sins are forgiven'? or to say, 'Get up and walk'?" Which is easier? It's easier to say, "Your sins are forgiven." What test can you run? Can you wheel in the spiritual x-ray machine and examine the man's soul? But if you say, "Get up and walk," well, everybody can verify that. Anybody can see if you did what you say. So Jesus said, "Get up, take your mat and go home." And it's reported so matter of factly, because it was a matter of fact. The man got up and went home. Instantly healed. Immediately healed. Inside healed. Outside healed. No therapy. No recovery. Wow! And did you catch, Jesus spoke these words primarily to the paralyzed man, and Jesus healed his outside mainly, maybe even only to prove, "I have the authority to heal the inside."

More than anything, Jesus wanted this paralyzed man to know, "Your sins are forgiven! Your inside is healed. I am Jesus and I have the authority to forgive sins." I have not only the power to heal you inside and out. I have the privilege to do so. That's the thing about authority. It's not just power. It's also the privilege to carry out that power. I have the power in my right foot to step on the gas pedal of a car until it goes 100 miles an hour. Whether or not my Honda Fit has the power to reach 100 is another thing. But do I have the privilege? Do I have the authority to do that? No! But Jesus has that power, to say, "Your sins are forgiven." And sins are forgiven. Instantly forgiven. Immediately forgiven. Inside and out forgiven.

Do you see what Jesus is saying? Jesus is clearly saying, "Your greatest need is always spiritual, no matter your physical condition. Your greatest need is always inside, no matter how you look or feel on the outside. Your greatest problem is always sin. And I am the only solution. My cross forgives your sin, instantly, immediately, inside and out. My empty tomb is your rock solid assurance, 'Your sins are forgiven.'" The cross! Christ! That meets our greatest need. The cross! Christ! That's all we need. Thankfully, not everyone was thinking evil thoughts. In fact, the crowd, the larger number was filled with awe. They thought, "This is awesome!" And they praised God! Good! Someone gets it! They praised God that he had given such authority to man. Wait! Maybe they didn't get it. How could they miss the point that Jesus is God, not just a man? But look at it another way. God is making the point, so we don't miss the point, God has given this authority to man. God has given the power and the privilege to man to

announce, "Friend, your sins are forgiven!" Jesus has forgiven the sins of all the world. It's not blasphemy to announce, "Friend, your sins are forgiven." It's beautiful to announce, "Friend, your sins are forgiven!" Jesus died for everyone's sins on the cross. And God has given this authority to man to announce this awesome news, "Friend, your sins are forgiven!" I know Jesus died for all sins. Of all people. Of all time. So I can say with confidence, "Friend, your sins are forgiven!"

It's not pastoral presumption when you heard a few minutes ago, "Friend, your sins are forgiven!" It's the power and privilege of every person who believes in Jesus. These words are not like Jesus is speaking. These words are Jesus speaking, "Friend, your sins are forgiven!" Jesus has all authority in heaven and on earth. And this Jesus says, "Friend, your sins are forgiven!" And Jesus tells us to go into all the world and proclaim this good news, "Friend, your sins are forgiven!" Jesus has given authority to man, to people to say, "Friend, your sins are forgiven!" The best thing a friend can say is the thing our best friend Jesus said, "Friend, your sins are forgiven!" Amen!

Hear again the words of Jesus, "Friend, your sins are forgiven!" Amen.