

Friends bring the Paralytic to Jesus, knows He's been healing, hoping for a healing. Jesus looks upon their faith, at the Paralytic, **your sins are forgiven.** It's seem a little anticlimactic, disappointing. That's not what they wanted; they wanted a healing. Then Jesus is accused of blasphemy that He exercises authority, forgive sins.

Of all the thing you pray, wish for, hope for, do you find yourself unsatisfied with 'just' forgiveness, take this gift lightly, or hold it of lesser importance in your life. We all take this gift for granted.

There's not more to Christianity than the forgiveness of sins. That is it. Oh there are other things but everything flows back to this. If it's of Christianity, than it must be connected to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Who he is, what He has done, how we get it. His Word, Sacraments. Why St. Paul says **I wish to know nothing among you except Christ and Him crucified.**

One of the things visitors and the world are taken aback, uncomfortable with in our services, what the historical Church has always done, when the pastor comes out in a dress -it's not a dress- says in absolution, **I forgive you your sins.** "*Who does he think he is, he can't forgiveness sins, only God can forgive sins.*" Exactly. Our Lord directs His pastors repeatedly to forgive sins - and withhold forgiveness- in His stead, with His authority, He commands it and the church still praises God for such authority given to men.

That's the most important work I do; bring the forgiveness of Christ in His Word and Sacraments, the exact same authority from Christ. How blessed are you, how great for you, Jesus pronounced to you personally your sins forgiven this very day, no less for you here and now, than that day with the paralytic.

**Which is easier, to forgive sins or miraculously, physically heal?** The easier, to say is **rise and walk.** Forgiving sins involves His sacrifice, the healing of the soul. The disease in your soul is so foul, so corrupt, so malignant that it runs deeper than any therapies, counseling, 12-step programs can reach.

How do you answer the question, "Where is God?" Many would say, "God is in heaven," "God is in my heart," "God is everywhere." Certainly not wrong; yet very lacking. For where has God promised to come to you with His very presence, to join Himself to you, where has He promised to come with forgiveness and grace. And that, is not everywhere, but He locates Himself in a place. So you can be sure.

The world does not get this. Even Christians don't get this, as most all American Christianity locate God only in the abstract, God is found, known in a relationship of feelings and through experiences or your commitment. How

sad. We even see in today's Old Testament reading, God's not merely everywhere. He's not just "out there," nor is He "in here," coming from within, but one who comes to be with His people.

I have no idea of relationship with God apart from where God has located Himself in concrete places of His choosing and authority to come to you by a font, from the Altar, from His preaching and word spoken to you.

The ministry of our Lord is a ministry of His very presence, of touch, of words. Where He tells you He is. That is what we need. Certainty from His Word and promise. Certainty you are forgiven by His authority.

In the Old Testament, Jacob is running from his lies, betrayal, what a family, his brother seeking to kill him, now with an uncertain future ahead, looking for a wife. Jacob is a lot like us. We are often the cause of our own problems. You live a mixture of good and bad and uncertainty, living with scars, you have a past, living with a dysfunctional family, with future uncertainty, and none of us have it all together. Our lives, too, more mixed up and complicated than we'd like them to be.

As with Jacob, God is not a far-off God in the abstract, but physically comes to you; given you promises, to calm your fears, ease your minds, even right now in the midst of all your issues.

The words that God spoke to Jacob He speaks to us at the holy font, **I am with you and will keep you wherever you go. I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken to you. I am with you always. I have called you by name; you are mine.** The God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob truly present in that water to choose people as His own, to create faith, forgive sins. As we gather around the Lord's altar, we can confess with Jacob, as real for you as with him. **The Lord is in this place. This is the House of God.**

**Who can forgive sins except God alone?** Do not take the forgiveness of sins for granted. Forgiveness of sins is everything for you. It is Christ. It lies at the heart of Christianity. You heard Him speak that to you today in the absolution and now joins His very life to you from His altar. If your sins are forgiven: you can face anything this world can throw at you. If your sins are forgiven: you can face disease, any hardship, betrayal, even death. If your sins are forgiven, **take heart dear child**, it's going to be okay for you. **He heals the brokenhearted, binds up their wounds.** You are healed through His blood, in baptismal waters, by His Word, by His preaching. Forgiven, living as His child. What more do you truly need. Jesus is still healing all over the place with His people just as He promises; confess with Jacob, **How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven.**