

Jesus reveals and heals your greatest need!

What is your greatest need? There may be different things going on in your life that would lead you to answer that question differently at different points in your life. If you asked a man named Esau from the Old Testament what his greatest need was when he came in from the field starving hungry, he'd have told you, "a bowl of stew, or I will die," which is what he traded his birthright for. But when his stomach was full, his greatest need was still empty.

If you asked a young man what his greatest need was when he was caught in the middle of a thunderstorm and he thought was going to get struck by lightning, you'd have heard him crying out to St. Anne, "Help me, save me from this storm!" But when the storm had subsided, Martin Luther's greatest need still remained, and St. Anne wasn't the one who was going to fill it.

If you ask me at 3:30 on Saturday afternoon about my greatest need, I might say, "Getting this sermon memorized before 5:30." Often the urgency of something makes it feel like our greatest need. As the year 2020 turned into 2021, maybe you've been thinking that our greatest need is a safe vaccine and the long awaited end to the miserable COVID-19 pandemic. If that was at the top of your priority list, you'd have plenty of company! When I google searched the phrase, "We need the pandemic to end," there were 648 million hits for that search. I'd say it's at the top of a few people's list.

But what about before the word COVID-19 ever existed or God-willing, after it's over? Once upon a time, it wasn't even on the list of priorities, and soon maybe it won't be again. But there will always be something urgent that seems to take its place: the next hospital room visit, a piling stack of bills and another month out of work, more injustice and strife in our nation. The continuous stream of problems and ailments just goes to show that a temporary fix to anything in this life can never meet our truly greatest need.

That's because our greatest need is like a black hole that nothing in this world can fill. But part of our problem is that no matter how many problems we have, we struggle even to understand what our biggest problem and our greatest need really is. Our text for today from Mark 2:1-12 is a story about four friends on a mission to help their paralyzed friend with his most obvious and urgent need. But in this story, we see **Jesus reveal and heal the man's greatest need-** and it wasn't his legs.

Jesus had come back home to the town of Capernaum, the place where he'd been living. He had just returned from his first tour around the towns of Galilee, preaching and casting out demons and healing people's diseases. Even though Jesus gave people strict orders not to tell anyone, the publicity about these miracles spread to the point where Jesus had to stay out in lonely places because he couldn't enter a town without a huge crowd flocking to him to be healed. They needed a quick fix for their problem.

This day was no different. **"The people heard that he had come home. They gathered in such large numbers that there was no room left, not even outside the door, and he preached the word to them."** (Mark 2:2) This was his first priority: to preach! That's why he had been on the move from village to village—so that he could actually preach! That was the whole reason he came, not just to become the town's resident magic healer, but to speak to an **even greater need.**

As he's preaching that day to a packed house, there's not even standing room left outside the door, when suddenly dust starts dropping from the roof. You can hear a bunch of guys tromping around up there and pretty soon there's light coming through the roof because these men are literally peeling off the thatching and the rafters. See, these four guys had brought their paralyzed friend to see Jesus for an obvious reason, but they had to get creative! **"Since they could not get to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus by digging through it and then lowered the mat the man was lying on."** (Mark 2:4). What a way to make an entrance!

I can just imagine Peter's mother-in-law standing by with a rolling pin because they just put a hole in the roof. I'm not sure what I would do if I was preaching and a body dropped through the roof—a little distracting for a minute! How is Jesus going to react? All eyes are queued in to see what happens next. You could cut the anticipation with a knife! Is he going to heal him? He's got to heal him right?

Here's what Jesus does. **'When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralyzed man, "Son, your sins are forgiven." (Mark 2:5).** What?? There's a curveball for the ages! Maybe there were gasps from the crowd in the background as people wondered, "Jesus, are you blind? Get back here and heal this man's legs!" But there again we see our problem. We don't even know what our greatest need is, but we like to think we can tell God what it is, thinking it's a quick fix to our urgent problems. But here the great Physician of body and soul stands over his patient and **reveals his greatest need.**

This man's body bears the side-effects of the same basic problem that infects you as well as me—sin. His paralysis was in a general way proof of the sin he was born with. Now this is a spot for careful understanding. What I'm not saying is that this man was paralyzed because this was God's punishment for some sin that he or his parents committed. That's the way the Jewish rabbis thought, that an ailment was God's vindictive retribution on sin. That's why on a different occasion, they asked Jesus, "Rabbi, who sinned? This blind man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answered, "Neither!" What the Bible does tell us is that all of creation bears the curse of frustration and hardship because of mankind's fall into sin, and so people will have diseases and sickness. But those are only side-effects of a terminal disease at the heart of it all—sin.

Jesus looks right through all the outward side-effects and comes immediately to proper diagnosis. Jesus reveals that his first priority is not the man's legs, but to take care of his greatest need. Having seen the faith these men displayed in knowing Jesus was the one they needed to get to, Jesus assures this man, **"Your sins are forgiven!"** Imagine the relief for a man who had likely been made to think that his paralysis was God's punishment on his sin. Right now, at this very moment, even while the man still remained paralyzed, this man had received the cure for his greatest ailment. He had forgiveness for his sin. **Jesus revealed and healed the man's greatest need.**

A hush falls over the crowd! This was certainly not what they expected to see. And of course, there's always some who don't like what they see. **"Some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, 'Why does this fellow talk like that? He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?' (Mark 2:7,8).** Technically, they were right. It is God alone who forgives sin, and anybody who tries to take that role for themselves is blaspheming—taking the place of God. Except the true irony of the situation is that these teachers of the law are really accusing God of being God. Jesus can't commit blasphemy because he's God.

Those teachers of the law are about to get more proof of that fact because before they even said anything, **"Immediately Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts, and he said to them, 'Why are you thinking these things? Which is easier: to say to this paralyzed man, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, take your mat and walk'?"**

Well which is easier? I could tell you all day long that your sins are forgiven, and you'd have no way to prove me wrong, because you don't have a spiritual X-ray machine to see forgiveness. But if I say to a paralyzed man, "Get up and walk" and he doesn't, I'm going to be exposed faster than you can "quack". So it's easy to say "You're forgiven", harder to prove it. So Jesus uses the seemingly harder one to prove the other. **"I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins." So he said to the man, 'I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.'** And... **"He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all." (Mark 2:12)**

Jesus has the authority to forgive sins because he is God, and he testified to that fact by doing something that only God can do—a miracle! The all were amazed and said, **"We've never see anything like**

this!" (2:12) Jesus was revealing the truth of the words the Prophet Isaiah had recorded centuries before. You heard it in our first lesson, **"I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more."** (Isaiah 43:25).

That's his privilege as God, to forgive sins. It's the **privilege he used to reveal and to heal your greatest need!** But let's get one thing straight. It was by no means easier than saying, "Get up and walk," because it's a privilege that cost him everything. He poured out his very lifeblood in order to win the forgiveness of sins that he freely gives to you. Your greatest need is the hole only Jesus can fill, and he fills it with forgiveness, full and free!

Before we close today, let me point out one final thing. If we had those rabbis standing here today, they'd be happy to point out that Pastor Wordell committed blasphemy at the beginning of our service today. He said, "I forgive you all your sins." What gives him the right to stand in the place of God? Jesus did, when after his resurrection he appeared to his disciples and said, **"As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."** **And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven."** (John 20:23)

So it is by the authority of Christ that believers continue to fill each other's greatest need. Dear friends in Christ, we proclaim forgiveness for you from the one who remembers your sins no more. Amen.

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, to him glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus, forever and ever. Amen.