

Let us pray: Lord, show us your glory, that we may tell of your salvation.

So what is easier – to heal a paralyzed person, or to forgive sins?
From the way Jesus asks the question, it seems clear to him that healing
is by far the easier. But I don't know if it seems that way to us.
After all – we know it's medically impossible to heal a paralyzed person, right?
Perhaps we over-estimate the difficulty of healing.
And perhaps we under-estimate the importance of forgiveness.
Perhaps we make too light a thing of the effect of sin in our lives.

What is sin? It is that basic leaning toward self, desire to satisfy ourselves,
that causes pain and hurt for ourselves, and for others.
It is a basic attitude, a way of seeing and dealing, in every human person –
and it causes us to act in ways that are hurtful; that separate us from God,
from other people, even from ourselves. It's quite natural, for humans.

Sin, our sin, our orientation toward love of self, has an effect on us.
And when we don't deal with it, it can paralyze us.
Not physically, perhaps – not so we have to be carried in on a stretcher –
but it can make us stuck in certain patterns that do not serve us;
It can make us stuck in areas of our lives where we want to be free.
And that, my friends, is what I believe God wants for us above all else:
That we be free. That is what Jesus came for – to make us free.

But it's not a cheap freedom. Jesus could have just released the paralytic
from the bondage of his disease, whatever had caused his paralysis.
Jesus could just have made the nerves and muscles work again – which,
we see at the end, He does. But Jesus perceived a greater bondage in the man.
And in the Pharisees. And in us.
It was that bondage Jesus came to deal with, in a way that no one else could.
It is that bondage that Jesus is here to deal with in us

Now, you may think, "I'm not in any kind of bondage. I don't need to be set free."
If that's the case, then you are blessed indeed.
But most of us are stuck in some area or another.

Many of us have trouble accepting forgiveness for one thing or another, either for something we've done, or for something in our personality that continues to cause pain to us, or to others.

Some of us have been hurt and find ourselves unable to forgive those who hurt us. And that causes us to be bound –

in some ways, to be bound to that person or persons who hurt us.

We are not free as long as we cannot forgive or accept forgiveness.

A woman once came to me for healing prayer, in this case what we call "inner healing," or prayer to heal emotional wounds.

This woman was deeply depressed and had been for many years.

She was a gifted architect, but she was paralyzed in every area of her life –

she was stuck in a relationship that was going nowhere;

she had given up her own apartment and gone back to live with her parents;

she had left a good job and was unable to get another one.

I asked why she had left the job and she said it was because the secretaries there insisted on playing the radio all day, and she couldn't stand it.

And she really couldn't. This woman was also intensely critical–

biting towards others, and constantly critical of herself.

She said that inner accusing voice never stopped.

My prayer partner and I prayed with her over a period of months, and often I felt we weren't getting anywhere. We got information – she suffered as a child in a home where her father was violently angry much of the time.

He didn't hit anyone, but the verbal abuse and intimidation were powerful.

But clues came. One day she told us that she was always exhausted as a child,

because she didn't sleep much. We asked why, and she said she lay in terror every night that her father would come up and scream at her.

He sat downstairs with the television on so loud that it penetrated every part of the house. She couldn't get away from it – the noise from the television was an extension of her father's rage and it permeated every boundary.

It had never occurred to me that noise could function as abuse.

Now we understood why she we leave a job rather than bear the sound of a radio blaring all day. Now we understood why she had later been in a relationship with a man who was physically abusive,

hitting her so hard one day that she had diminished hearing in one ear.

We were now able to pray with greater clarity for some of these inner wounds to be healed, to pray toward her ability to forgive.

I really felt that some profound healing had taken place. But when we finished praying for the day, I had a nagging sense that God was urging me to something more. I tried to shake it off, because I felt foolish. Yet, I felt God was pushing me. At least I hoped it was God and not my ego or some testing spirit. I finally went ahead.

In addition to the psychic wounds which my friend brought, on that day she had wounds on her hands; at first I thought she had been cutting herself. When I mentioned it, she said, "Oh, this is just a fungus I get every summer. There's nothing I can do for it; I just have to wait for the season to change." I felt the Spirit urging me to pray about the hands too, that God wanted to heal the surface wounds as a sign to us that he was healing the inside wounds. So as she was thanking us profusely for the powerful peace she was feeling after our inner healing prayer, I said, "Uh..., can we pray for your hands as well?" I took her hand and said a short, simple prayer and let it go.

I didn't hear anything for a few days, so I concluded that this was my own limb I had gone out on, not God's. But a week later, she called about something else, and before hanging up said, "Oh, by the way, I forgot to tell you, the fungus on my hands cleared up the next day. And not just on my hands, it also cleared up on my feet. This has never happened; I'm usually stuck with this all summer." And what I'd hoped, that this outer healing was a sign of the inner healing, was true; a few months later she told us how profoundly her life has been changed. She said the critical voice inside was just totally gone – that her whole internal landscape had changed. She was taking steps in her life where she had been paralyzed before, she was undertaking new ministries, and was much more at peace with herself and the world.

Our God heals. Our God is a God who heals. The Greek word that means "I save," also means "I heal." God is concerned not just about our spiritual salvation, but also about our whole being. And he's not just concerned about our bodies, but the deep healing – the healing of our souls, the healing of our spirits. Sometimes we don't see physical healing when we pray for it because there's a spiritual blockage, guilt we haven't been willing to repent or let go of, or an injury done to us we haven't been willing to forgive.

Jesus looked at that man on the stretcher, and at the faith of those who brought him, and knew what needed to be healed first: he needed forgiveness and then release.

God always knows in what order we need to be healed, and God is in the business of healing all of us, body, mind and spirit.

Healing is one of the ways we can most vividly meet Jesus.

We can do the kind of prayer where we settle into silence and let our imaginations play – and imagine Jesus however he comes to mind. And then, like those friends, bring someone you love, or yourself, into his presence. See what unfolds in your imagination.

We are going to practice it right now.

Is there anyone here who would like us to pray for healing for them?

...

I invite you to get comfortable in your pew, both feet on the floor...

Deep breaths... let your body settle. Let your mind settle. Let your spirit open.

Guided prayer

Amen.

Mark 2:1-12

A few days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come home. So many gathered that there was no room left, not even outside the door, and he preached the word to them. Some men came, bringing to him a paralytic, carried by four of them. Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus and, after digging through it, lowered the mat the paralyzed man was lying on. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven." Now 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?"

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 the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, take your mat and walk'? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins" He said to the paralytic, "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home." He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all. This amazed everyone and they praised God, saying, "We have never seen anything like this!"

2 Corinthians 1:18-22

But as surely as God is faithful, our message to you is not "Yes" and "No." For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by me and Silas and Timothy, was not "Yes" and "No," but in him it has always been "Yes." For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ. And so through him the "Amen" is spoken by us to the glory of God. Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.