

Jesus Reveals a Merciful God Second Week of Advent Monday, December 7, 2015
8:15 AM Is 35:1-10; **Lk 5:17-26** (St. Ambrose, bishop, doctor of the Church) (God is love. God is mercy. So Jesus is just stating the fact: “Your sins are forgiven.”)

“**We have seen incredible things today**”—and heard incredible things, although we didn’t really understand what it was.

This is a very problematic story because, again, like so many stories it has **different levels**. On one level Jesus heals somebody, but the story goes much deeper than that. The question comes up: “Who can forgive sins but God alone?” Well, at first Jesus didn’t say; in fact, he never says in this story “I forgive you,” nor does he say “God forgives you.” What he says is, “**Your sins are forgiven.**” **That’s a statement of fact.** That’s a proclamation of **the fact that God is forgiving, that God is merciful.** Jesus isn’t really doing anything. This is a problem that Christians have often had, that forgiveness involves somebody doing something. Well, if you forgive someone who has offended you, yes, you are doing something. **But we cannot ascribe to God the same sort of pettiness, littleness that we have that makes forgiveness such an effort.** So you are hurt and now you really have to overcome that and you really have to struggle to accept somebody that has really hurt you. But God doesn’t struggle like that. That isn’t the way God is. **God is love. God is mercy.** It is God’s nature, yes, to create, to forgive, to heal, to bind up, to gather. That’s God’s nature. **So Jesus is just stating the fact: “Your sins are forgiven.”**

Now why did he state it? I don’t know. Here’s a man on a mat, paralyzed. His friends are helping him—good for them. When we can’t move it’s good if someone moves for us—that’s good. But what does it have to do with forgiveness? I don’t know. But Jesus stated what he thought perhaps was obvious: “Your sins are forgiven.” And then they start to worry, to be troubled by this because in their mind that’s not true—**in their mind that’s not true. That’s**

what this is about: is God forgiving or not? Well, in their mind, no. And the proof is look at this paralyzed man; aha, that comes from sin. So when the Pharisees and the scribes, the teachers of the Law, looked at the world, **they saw all this suffering**, they said, well, that's God, **that's God bringing retribution for being offended. And Jesus says, no**, that is not what you see. **What you see is a creation that is still incomplete**, and indeed I have been sent to complete it, or at least to begin the completion of it. That's why Jesus is always **healing on the Sabbath. The Sabbath was supposed to be a day of rest. Well, Jesus can't rest.**

Now the question—I really don't know what the point of the question was: "What is easier to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or 'Pick up your mat'?" I don't know which is easier; I can't answer that question. But obviously Jesus had already told him his sins are forgiven. Now he says, **"Pick up your mat."** Now **this is an act; this is something Jesus is doing. He is not just stating a fact here.** He is actually doing something. But he is doing something because "the power of the Lord was with him for healing," meaning the Spirit was pushing him into it, the Spirit received in his baptism, in his humanity. The Spirit led him into the desert to be tempted. **Now the Spirit is pushing him to heal.** So something is going on. **This is the Spirit healing, but he is stating the truth: God is merciful.** And it's all tied together, but **it's terribly astonishing and troubling for certain people for whom this is not the God they know.**