

Which Is Easier?

By Rev. Todd Farnsworth

Mark 2: 1-7



A few days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come home. 2 They gathered in such large numbers that there was no room left, not even outside the door, and he preached the word to them. 3 Some men came, bringing to

him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them. 4 Since they could not get him 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. 5 When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralyzed man, "Son, your sins are forgiven."

6 Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, 7 "Why does this fellow talk like that? He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

8 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? 9 Which is easier: to say to this paralyzed man, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, take your mat and walk'? 10 But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins." So he said to the man, 11 "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home." 12 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!"

The healing of the man from Capernaum is a beautiful story. I'm guessing that many of you have heard it before and can probably tell the story if I asked you. I won't ask you. The story is retold in the gospels of Matthew and Luke, so we know it made an impression on the Christian community.

The story begins with Jesus visiting with some friends and word spreads and the house that he is visiting in becomes full up with people. Jesus is telling stories and they are hanging on his every word and that word spreads throughout Capernaum and reaches a man who is paralyzed. Or maybe it reaches his friends. Or maybe they aren't friends. Maybe they are just people who have compassion for the man who is ill. The gospels are not clear about that. They are clear, however, that the four people risk infection, risk spiritual contamination, and lift the man up on a pallet and carry him to where Jesus might heal him.

It's a great image. People walking through the streets trying to get to Jesus. Trying to get help for this man they may or may not know.

I can imagine people bumping into them, asking, "What are you doing?"

"We're bringing this man to see Jesus. Maybe he can help him." Maybe.

There is hope. And the people in the street are either inspired or appalled by the act of carrying someone with disease through their midst...but the men press on toward the house. And when they arrive they discover that the doors are blocked with people listening to Jesus. As they approach and call out, "Hey, we have someone who needs healing!" they are shushed.

Rebuffed. Turned away. But they persist. Eyeballing the house they climb onto the roof...with-the-man! They hoist him up and begin chipping away at the roof. Seeing Jesus is important. Getting this man healing is important. Even the possibility is more important than having to come back and rebuild the owner's roof!

Inside there is a hacking noise. Straw and mud and hard chunks of roof begin to fall on the heads of Jesus and his listeners. This has become a holy space and the idea of anything, anyone interrupting it is obscene!

And then they see what looks like a pallet being lowered down.

And then they see a very sick man strapped to the pallet.

And now *disease* has profaned their gathering!

They move back, away from the pallet...and Jesus moves closer to the pallet.

It's what we hope would happen to us, right? When we are sick or paralyzed by life. We hope that someone will notice our plight and help us connect with Jesus? Connect with holy? Connect with the possibility of healing?

And Jesus does what we expect Jesus to do because we know him better than the folks in that room.

Jesus sees that the four people on the roof have faith in him to help.

Jesus can see the man's shame. Jesus can see the man's stigma. Jesus can see that what is needed in that moment is a spiritual cleanse that can make room for a physical response.

Jesus offers the man on the pallet forgiveness. Jesus offers the man a reconnection with God. Jesus gives the man peace.

He doesn't ask for an insurance card.

He doesn't ask for ID.

He doesn't ask if the man is a citizen or not.

He doesn't ask if there is a pre-existing condition.

Jesus offers forgiveness. Compassion. Healing.

Can you see yourself there? Maybe as the vulnerable person in need.

Maybe as the people who carried him to Jesus.

Maybe as a disciple of Jesus who would do the same thing.

It feels good to be part of the story...right?

I told you this is a beautiful story.

But there are other people in the room. People who have other ideas and other agendas. They are appalled by the four on the roof. They are appalled by the man on the pallet. They are appalled by Jesus' words and actions.

They complain. Jesus hasn't followed the rules.

They refrain. Jesus is encouraging people to associate with sinners.

They blame. Jesus is leading the people into thinking that he has the authority of God to forgive.

And they are correct on all three counts.

And they are wrong on all three counts.

Their perspective makes us uncomfortable because we can see ourselves in their position, too. Sometimes we complain, refrain, or blame.

I think that this story has such resonance across the years because it calls us, demands for us, to look for, watch for, where we are in the story.

- When we witness someone who is struggling with mental or physical illness we must ask ourselves: who will we be in that person's story?
- When we read about swastikas being found in our local schools or bullying of our children we must ask: who are we in these community stories?
- When we open our newspaper or check the news on tv or on our phones, and we read the state of the nation or the state of our world; we read about the earthquake in Puerto Rico, or the fires in Australia we must ask ourselves: who will we be in those stories?

This morning's lesson is a beautiful story. It's a memorable story that concludes with these words:

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? 9 Which is easier: to say to this paralyzed man, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, take your mat and walk'? 10 But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins." So he said to the man, 11 "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home." 12 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!"

Let's remember that this is our story, and live it with integrity, the best we are able, asking, *which is easier?* To play the parts of the solution, or to play the parts that maintain distance between a person who is vulnerable and God?

Let's shoot for "amazing" in Jesus spirit.

Amen.