

Tear the Roof Off!

“...and after having dug through the roof,
they let down the mat on which the paralytic lay.”

Mark 2:1-12
College Hill Presbyterian Church, Tulsa

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A few words of introduction before I read this morning's scripture lesson. When it comes to reading the Bible from a spiritual perspective it's often very effective to **try and see elements of your personal life story reflected in the biblical story**, and vice versa. Which of the many characters in any given story, for instance, do you find yourself drawn to? Ask yourself why. If you find a point of connection, try putting yourself in their shoes to see how the story might unfold. Or, you might find a particular word, phrase or theme that strikes a note of interest to you. Pay attention to that. This method of reading the Bible goes back to the very beginning. It is known, in the Latin, as **Lectio Divina**, or divine reading. *Lectio* (a reading) is also the word from which we get lectionary.

Given where you are at any particular point in your own journey of faith, the next time you read or hear that story, you might connect best with another character or theme or perspective. In other words, there's never just one interpretation. **And the one that strikes a chord for you is perhaps what you need to pay attention to at that moment. Perhaps it is the Sacred Presence within you speaking to your spirit.**

With this as an introduction, I encourage you to find the particular character or theme that you connect with this morning as I now share today's assigned lectionary Gospel Reading, Mark 2:1-12.

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Did you find a point of connection in and with this story? As it turns out, there are several interesting, informative, and different perspectives. The **cast of characters** in any given story is often larger than we realize. Let's take a look.

- There's the **large crowd** that gathered around Jesus to hear him teach. Perhaps you located yourself among them, listening with anticipation to Jesus's words and learning his ways.
- There's the **four friends** who carried their paralyzed friend on a mat, who rip an opening in the roof of the house to lower the man down to Jesus. I call this group of characters the mat carriers. Perhaps you can relate to taking the actions necessary to do whatever it takes to help another who is in need.
- There's the **person who suffered from paralysis**, who's sins are forgiven, and who's body is healed so that he was able to stand up and walk home.

Perhaps you can relate to what might be described as areas of paralysis in your life, whether they be physical, emotional, or spiritual – anything that's holding you back from experiencing wholeness and living life to the fullest.

- There's **Jesus**, of course, who after being interrupted by human need brings healing and wholeness to the person who was paralyzed, both in terms of spiritual healing – in the forgiveness of his sins, and of physical healing.

Since we are called to further the ministry begun by Jesus, it's not uncommon to relate to Jesus himself. In the attitudes and actions of Jesus, we recognize our need to offer forgiveness and possibilities for new life to others.

- And, there are the **scribes**, who accuse Jesus of blasphemy for making claims of forgiveness that only God can make. For the scribes, the entire incident is one of who has the proper authority to say and do certain things. Jesus, in their estimation, was outside the limits of proper authority.

Perhaps there is a point of connection here, as well, questioning the authority that others claim to have, those who you believe have no right to be in positions of authority, or for those whose authority you no longer respect.

**Approaching any biblical story with this method of seeking points of personal connection can make the scriptures come alive, adding a deeper element of learning and spiritual growth.** At some level, there is probably a bit of each and every character in all of us that you and I can relate to. As a preacher, however, when I prepare a sermon I usually try to focus on just one particular element, angle, or theological perspective. **And when I reflect upon this community of faith known as College Hill, I gravitate to the actions of the friends of the person who is paralyzed.**

What moved me most in this story is what it has to say about being a compassionate friend to someone in need. Or, to use the imagery from the story itself, being a mat carrier. The four friends, each carrying a corner of the mat on which their friend lay, could not get inside the house to see Jesus because the crowd was so large. Not letting that stop them, they take the extraordinary measure of climbing up on the roof with their friend. Ripping open a hole in a mud thatched roof large enough for a person is a drastic step. I've always wondered what the homeowner thought of all this, let alone the debris falling on Jesus and the crowd. Evidently that's beside the point. They call that 'reading too much into a story.'

Nonetheless, the gospel writer Mark describes the result of this effort with the simple phrase, **"Jesus saw their faith" – the faith of the four friends.** Interestingly, there is no specific mention of the faith of the person needing to be healed. And there is no verbal public confession of faith accompanying these actions because the actions themselves spoke of their confidence and trust in Jesus. Unlike most other miracle healing stories, which include the line, "Your faith has made you well," **this person was healed in response to the faith shown by his friends. It was their voluntary, persistent, active intercession and teamwork that made all the difference.**

Perhaps there's a mantra in there for us, as individuals and as a congregation. If you can't go in through the door, tear the roof off! This should give us encouragement to intercede for those who are in need. This should give us courage to put our hopes and prayers into very real action. It's certainly one of the ways to exhibit two of the

three points in our congregation's Mission Statement – *Receive and openly share the love of God, and Reach out with a compassionate voice for peace and justice.*

One of the important lessons we can deduce from this story, then, is that **while our individual faith is important, so is the faith and actions of this entire community of faith.** To use the imagery of today's story, sometimes you may find yourself like the person who is paralyzed laying on the mat, relying on the help of your family, friends, and community to carry you. At other times, you may find yourself to be like one of the mat carriers, joining with family, friends, and this community of faith to help another. I encourage you, therefore, to reflect upon the following.

- **Have you ever considered that it may be the faith, love, compassion and actions of your family, friends or community that helps contribute to your healing and wholeness?**
- **Have you ever considered that it may be by your faith, love, compassion, and actions that a family member or friend (or perhaps a complete stranger) has found healing and wholeness?**

Give thanks to God for those who have been, or currently are, 'mat carriers' in your life. And be willing to be a 'mat carrier' for others. In fact, let us be known as a congregation of 'mat carriers,' those particular Presbyterians who are willing to tear the roof off.

Amen.

