

St. Matthew's Church

NEW YORK CITY

CARRIED TO THE FEET OF CHRIST

Mark 2:1-12

Seventh Sunday after Epiphany, February 22, 2009

“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” (Mark 2:1-2). Almost immediately the home in which Jesus stayed was packed with people. Some were just curious and as is always the case, crowds attract greater crowds, and soon it was impossible to get to the door. Outside there was dust, noise, heat, disease, jostling, and crowding.

There are two dominating presences: (1.) In Luke's Gospel he tells us there were “Pharisees and teachers of the law.” To the unsuspecting crowd these theological heavyweights may have looked like a “Spiritual Life Conference,” but in actuality they were an investigative committee eager to find something wrong with the young rabbi. While there was standing room only, the text says the Pharisees were “setting.” I think we all get the picture, they were seated in honored positions, and just waiting for a slip-up by Jesus. We could easily believe there was fire in the air. (2.) The other presence was the Lord Jesus, who was calm, unperturbed, in control. “He preached to them;” about the nearness of the Kingdom and the necessity of faith and repentance. I think the people sensed the tension, not that they knew exactly what it was, but they sensed something was going to happen. In the Gospel of Luke we have these words; “The power of the Lord was present for Him to heal the sick.” The room was charged and the atmosphere crackled.

Believing Faith Arrived: “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 of the paralyzed man who was lying on” (Mark 2:3-

4). As they approached the crowd they were met with noisy rebuffs. After conferring with each other they picked up the stretcher, and moved around the crowd to the side of the flat-roofed house. After much hauling and pushing they had their friend on the roof, where they rested long enough to catch their breath. Then they did an amazing thing: they began to tear a hole in the roof.

Those inside the house heard the shoveling, then the pounding amidst loud conversation as the men dug away the dirt, tore the braches, and pried the roofing loose between the beams. Debris began to fall on those in the house, and then there was a crack of light which widened to a size of a man. And then here was the warning from those above, and down came the paralytic's bed on ropes. What a picture! Above, with light steaming past them in dusty beams, four sweaty, determined faces; below, the Pharisees and scribes shaking dirt from their robes and in the midst of all in attendance were the Prince of Glory and the Paralytic.

These four men loved him, and were doing everything they possibly could, and they were not discouraged by the crowd. They even "vandalized" another's property to achieve their goal. They ignored the protests and judgments of those around them for the sake of their friend. Whatever the relationship, one thing is sure, they loved him! And whatever happened that day, healing, rejection, whatever, the paralytic was every rich man, because he had what some people spend millions and yet never find, and that is friendship. And God was going to work in his life because his friends loved him. So they carried him to the feet of the Lord Jesus Christ, I think God is especially pleased to work when there is such love.

Their Faith Was Persistent: Along with great love, his friends had great faith. There was no way they would have gone to such outrageous extremes of action if they did not implicitly believe that Christ could and would heal their friend. When they got their friend on the stretcher, there was no stopping them. When they came to an obstacle, none of them said, "Well, the door is closed. I guess this isn't the Lord's will." They did not leave it in committee either. They got going! Jesus lauded this type of action in the enigmatic saying; "From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing, and forceful men lay hold of it" (Matthew 11:12). Those who really want something spiritually and "go for it" are the ones who get it. When the four tore through the roof, they

took the kingdom by violent, determined force. Such faith unleashes God's power.

Their Faith Was Also Creative: Undoubtedly some were standing by whom, seeing the others' success, said "Why didn't I think of that?" The answer is, they did not believe as passionately and love as much as the four. A faith which truly believes that Christ is the only way will be inventive. This legendary creativity of ministry springs from the passionate, driving belief that Christ is the only hope for the world. Believing faith finds a way, whether in the home, the school, or the whole world.

Their Faith Was Sacrificial: Somebody would have to pay for the roof or fix it, and that would take time, labor, and expense. A faith that brings Christ's power to the world is always willing to pay the price. Oh, how they loved their helpless friend! Oh, how the world must be loved by us...truly loved.

The real paralytics were the Pharisees and scribes. In marked contrast to the four stretcher-bearers, they were just "setting there." As religious leaders, they should have been directing the traffic to Jesus and his free clinic. When the roof opened, they should have reached up to receive the poor cripple. But instead of love, there was indifference. Instead of faith, there was only criticism.

Our Lord sees things more clearly than we do. So He decided to use this moment, with the paralytic before Him, to make His point. Knowing that the Pharisees and scribes were looking for something to pin on Him, He gave it to them or so they thought. "When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic: "Son, your sins are forgiven." From our perspective it seems cruel. Here is a wretched paralytic, barely able to raise his head, hoping for a cure, and Christ says; "your sins are forgiven." From the Pharisees' perspective, this was blasphemy, for only God could forgive sins.

Why did Christ say it? Regardless of the man's physical condition, his greatest need by far was forgiveness of sin. Forgiveness was a far greater work, for it cost Christ his very life. He met the man's greatest need first and eternally. Jesus pronounced forgiveness first to trap the Pharisees with the implications of the healing He was going to perform. Verses 8 through 11 reveal His logic: "Immediately Jesus knew in His spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts, and He said to them; '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 of earth to forgive sins. He said to the paralytic, 'I tell you, take your mat and go home.'" His *Physical* miracle verified His *Moral* miracle. What could the Pharisees say?

Because of the immensity of the gifts of God's Son; we may be confident He will freely give us all things.

What will He not bestow?
Who feely gave this mighty gift unbought,
Unmerited, unheeded and unsought,
What will He not bestow?
He spared not His Son!
'Tis this that silences each rising fear,
'Tis this that bids the hard thought disappear.
He spared not His Son!

Horatius Bonar

And this is what happened: "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.'" What a moment! What a display before the wondering crowd. Who is to say that the paralytic and his four friends did not dance down the street while the multitude clapped in rhythm? And as he went home, he bore something far more impressive than his bed. It was a clean heart, the greatest miracle of all, not guilt, no bitterness, and no tension. Someday those newly restored limbs would wither. But there would remain in him a well of water springing up to everlasting life, for his sins were forgiven.

The Lord can do anything He wants. He can heal any disease he pleases. But the greatest miracle, the only one that is eternal, is that He forgives sin. Has He ever said to you, "your sins are forgiven?" So we, without qualification, believe this? If we do then we will be persistent, creative, and sacrificial in bringing our friends to Christ.

"When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, 'Son, your sins are forgiven...stand up, take your mat and go to your home.'" Thank God for the faith of the others who carry us on our mat to the feet of Christ.