

**PARK HILL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH  
SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY  
REV. JOHN L. THOMPSON  
“WHAT A FRIEND WE HAVE IN JESUS”  
Mark 2:1-12  
February 19, 2012  
9:00 & 11:00 A.M. SERVICES**

This man needed both his friends and Jesus in order to be healed. He was paralyzed, so four friends were needed to carry his pallet. They not only took him to Jesus, but opened a hole in the roof so they could lower him down to Jesus. The man was healed and his friends rejoiced with him.

We have a true friend in Jesus. We have no higher calling than to be a true friend. At the heart of Jesus' teaching is love for our neighbor, and Jesus made it clear that our neighbor is anyone in need. No need is too small or too great to be ignored by a friend.

As a healer, Jesus was not a specialist. His concern was for persons in need, whether their problem was physical, psychological, or spiritual. His goal was to provide wholeness for people, so they might have abundant life. Whatever keeps us from the life that God intends for us is of genuine concern to Jesus.

Given our advanced understandings of medicine and health, we tend to see our biblical ancestors as primitive and naïve about the causes and cures of illness. But ancient physicians occasionally had insights into diagnosing and treating illness that are impressive for that time. Ancient peoples had strong, simplistic beliefs about God (or the gods) being the source of healing. This tended to discourage speculation about other sources or means of healing. Miracle workers represented a kind of middle ground, a human agent being used by a divine power.

The Gospel of Mark is the first of the four Gospels to be written. Matthew and Luke (and perhaps John) were familiar with Mark's Gospel when they wrote their own. Because it is so accurate and descriptive, Mark's Gospel is thought to be based on eye-witness recollections. This particular Mark was too young to have been an apostle, but he may have been a disciple of Simon Peter, thus recording his

memories. Many scholars believe Mark's Gospel was written in Rome, primarily for Gentile Christians.

It was Jesus' miracles that attracted the most attention. People in every age are naturally drawn to the magical and extraordinary, especially if it involves healing. The remarkable thing is not how many people Jesus healed, but how many he did not heal. In some situations there was an obvious reluctance on his part to continue healing, and often he was overwhelmed by the crowds of those who sought him. He had not come primarily to be a healer or miracle-worker, yet this was the way he was being seen. Mark includes many of Jesus' miracles, yet he seems to be soft-pedaling this aspect, saying, "***He's not just a miracle worker, but much more.***" Jesus, in Mark, is seen at times to be unable to perform miracles, and at other times unwilling to do so. Mark's Gospel seems more concerned to present Jesus as the suffering "***Son of man***" who is moving toward his eventual death than as an increasingly popular miracle worker. The evidence is that the Mediterranean world had no shortage of miracle workers and healers, so this alone would not have made Jesus unique.

Here we have one of Jesus' most memorable miracles. It involved lowering a paralyzed man through the roof to be healed. Jesus was in Capernaum, possibly in the home of Simon Peter. There were so many people trying to reach Jesus that they were spilling over into the streets. Four men brought a paralytic on a pallet. There being no way to reach Jesus, they took him up on the roof. Digging through the roof above where Jesus was standing, they lowered the man on the pallet down to him. Jesus was moved by the faith of these men and healed the paralytic. His words, however, made no mention of healing. He said, "***My son, your sins are forgiven.***" Some of the religious leaders overheard this and thought, "***This is blasphemy! Who can forgive sins but God alone?***" Jesus knew what they were thinking. He said, "***So that you will know that the Son of man has power on earth to forgive sins***" - - then he turned to the invalid, "***I say to you, rise, take up your pallet and go home.***" The people said, "***We never saw anything like this!***"

What is most important to Jesus in this event is the forgiveness of sin. His first words to the man are that his sins are forgiven. In reacting to the religious leaders, Jesus claims his authority, as the "***Son of man,***" to forgive sin. Only after twice emphasizing his authority to forgive sin does he address the man's healing. It is also interesting that the religious leaders seem to have little if any difficulty with Jesus' healing miracles, but insist that only God can forgive a person's sins. Today we would likely find the opposite reaction, with people open to someone forgiving sin, but certain that no one could perform a miraculous healing.

We might ask how many miracles took place with the paralytic, one or two? Perhaps two: first, the miracle of forgiveness; second, the miracle of healing. Jesus did both and therefore has the God-given power both to heal and to forgive. Let's ask, however, how much we really know about the healing power of forgiveness?

In the first century people did not distinguish between the physical and the spiritual. Not only did they not know the **"laws of nature,"** they did not separate physical reality from spiritual reality as the modern world has tended to do. Ironically, we inhabitants of the twenty-first century are becoming less dualistic, and more holistic. The familiar distinctions between space and matter, physical and spiritual, inner and outer, immanent and transcendent, etc., are being seen less as absolute distinctions and more as aspects of wholeness; a unified reality. We understand that true healing is often psychosomatic, involving the whole person. We also understand better than ever how negative emotions, such as guilt, can be manifested in all manner of ailments - - physical, emotional, and spiritual. Guilt is sometimes literally paralyzing, physically paralyzing.

Psychiatrist and theologian Ruth Tiffany Barnhouse says a neurosis is an unsuccessful attempt at self-healing, and she points out that in some languages **"healing"** and **"salvation"** are the same word. If the paralytic Jesus healed had deep-seated guilt as the root cause of his paralysis, then what could have possibly been more liberating, more healing, more transforming than to hear Jesus utter the words, ***"My son, your sins are forgiven"***?

Discrimination exists everywhere, even among helpers. Some people want to help only those who are not responsible for their unfortunate or desperate situation. If someone is out of work, they will help, unless the jobless person was fired. If someone has a respiratory illness, they will help, unless the sick person had been a smoker. Jesus did not discriminate. It is judgmental to put a needy person in a double whammy situation, making determinations only God is qualified to make. Every suffering person is a child of God and deserves compassion. If you are here and need another chance from God this morning, I would love to be your pastor. I would love for this to be your church.