

Called to Heal

Mark 2:1-12

¹ When he returned to Capernaum after some days, it was reported that he was at home. ² So many gathered around that there was no longer room for them, not even in front of the door; and he was speaking the word to them. ³ Then some people came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them. ⁴ And when they could not bring him to Jesus because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him; and after having dug through it, they let down the mat on which the paralytic lay. ⁵ When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, “Son, your sins are forgiven.” ⁶ Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts, ⁷ “Why does this fellow speak in this way? It is blasphemy! Who can forgive sins but God alone?” ⁸ At once Jesus perceived in his spirit that they were discussing these questions among themselves; and he said to them, “Why do you raise such questions in your hearts? ⁹ Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Stand up and take your mat and walk?’ ¹⁰ But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”—he said to the paralytic— ¹¹ “I say to you, stand up, take your mat and go to your home.” ¹² And he stood up, and immediately took the

mat and went out before all of them; so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, “We have never seen anything like this!”

Theme Statement

The study of Mark’s account of Jesus healing the man who was paralyzed helps us appreciate how one’s physical, emotional, social, and spiritual needs are intertwined. We pray for God’s healing grace to touch us at our particular point of need.

Exploring the Word

Western cultures frequently see the world in a dualistic fashion. Something is either this or that. Eastern cultures are usually more aware of the integration of things and of their influence on each other. Even these statements reflect a dualistic Western orientation.

In the scripture passage for this session, Jesus attempts to help the scribes move beyond such a limited “this or that” view of wholistic health and see how one’s physical, emotional, social, and spiritual needs are intertwined.

Mark 2:1-2 The crowd at Capernaum

In Matthew 4:13 we learn that Jesus moved from Nazareth to Capernaum. Perhaps it was to have a more diverse crowd to teach. Mark 1:21-28 describes his teaching in the synagogue there.

Capernaum was a prosperous Galilean town founded in the eleventh century BCE by the Hasmoneans. It was home to Jews, Romans, and Gentiles. Remember, though, that prosperity was unequally enjoyed. The powerful elite were substantially better off than the much larger working population.

Jesus made Capernaum a hub of his ministry because its location allowed him to speak to a predominantly Jewish audience on one side of the Sea of Galilee and to easily cross over to the other side, which was predominantly Gentile. Capernaum is located near the northernmost part of the lake. The other side is not as far away at that point.

Mark 2:3-5 Whatever it takes

The group of people went to extraordinary measures to get their friend to Jesus. Tearing apart a portion of the roof, they lowered him into the home, and Jesus responded by saying that the man was forgiven.

What was the roof like? It was probably made of basalt, one of the most common stones on earth. It is strong and can be easily cut into thin sheets. The sheets of stone would have been placed on supporting beams and covered with a layer of plaster to make them waterproof. The roof would have been strong enough to hold the weight of five grown men. It was probably an achievement to break through the roof to lower the paralyzed man to Jesus.

Why did Jesus forgive sins instead of just healing the man? The connection between healing and forgiveness was certainly in the history of the Jewish people. Proverbs 18:14 says, “The human spirit will endure sickness; but a broken spirit—who can bear?”

Doctors today say the effects of forgiveness on healing include lowering the risk of heart attack, improving cholesterol levels and sleep, and even reducing pain, blood pressure, anxiety, depression, and stress. This applies to both the one doing the forgiving and the one forgiven.

Mark 2:6-7 Questioning Jesus’ identity

The first reaction of the scribes, those who were focused

on strict observance of the law, interpreted Jesus’ actions as violating the law. His words were those reserved for God alone. Maybe they were asking the wrong question and not seeing Jesus for who he was: God with us.

Mark 2: 8-9 Jesus questions questions

The Greek word Mark uses for heart is *kardais*, which refers to one’s spirit or inner being. We see Jesus ask the scribes to examine why his words are so uncomfortable for them.

Mark 2:10-12 “So that you may know”

Forgiveness is one of the most powerful expressions of grace. When Jesus uses the expression “the Son of Man,” he is referring to himself and expressing his role in God’s salvation plan. In the Lord’s Prayer, Jesus teaches us to ask God’s forgiveness as we have forgiven others. In John 20:23 he gives his followers the power to forgive others for their sins: “If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

The African American spiritual “There Is a Balm in Gilead” reminds us that Jesus’ healing ministry was also about forgiveness. The connection between the two is undeniable.

The Word Today

Healing and wholeness happen not only for individuals but also for communities, though often, brave individuals are required to carry the load to Jesus.

On an October morning in 2006, a thirty-two-year-old gunman entered an Amish one-room school in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, and began a short but violent event. First, he sent a pregnant woman, three parents with infants, and the boy students outside, barricading the door with ten girl students still inside. Forty-five minutes later, as leaders from the community began to arrive, the gunman started shooting. Before taking his own life, he shot the girls, killing five.

In the days and weeks that followed, the Amish community's response—forgiving the shooter—made national headlines. It was “about following Jesus, . . . doing what Jesus . . . taught in the Lord's Prayer,” said author Steven Nolt, ““Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors” (“Amish Forgiveness,” September 21, 2007, interview, *Religion and Ethics Newsweekly*, <https://tinyurl.com/yy97lx64>).

For the vast majority of people who heard what the community said, this was extreme. Most could understand anger, bitterness, resentment, and the desire for vengeance. But those things eat away at us and affect us physically and emotionally. They go to our core and change even the way we see the world and access God's grace. Forgiveness that comes from our heart, the deepest part of who we are, heals the pain that others bring into our lives.

May we all marvel at that grace, shown in the healing of the paralyzed man and in the forgiveness given by those who lost children at the country school. Just as Jesus was impressed by the faith of the men who carried their paralyzed friend, the disciples in Lancaster County impressed many and led them to believe in the gracious healing Son of God. May we have the courage to follow their example.

Questions for Discussion

Beginnings

1. What words do you associate with physical healing? With emotional healing?

Exploring the Word

1. Why do you think Mark makes sure the reader knows this event happened in Capernaum?
2. When the men started tearing at the roof, what do you think was the reaction of the following people?

The paralyzed man	Jesus
The crowd	The owner of the house

3. Focusing on tone, how would Jesus' words to the scribes sound if they were spoken by:

Mr. Rogers	Winston Churchill
Mother Teresa	Rosa Parks

4. What do you think Jesus would say if he had a conversation with scribes who were willing to listen to his message?

The Word Today

1. What happens to your spirit when you are forgiven?
2. What happens to your spirit when you forgive?

Closing Prayer

Lord, make us instruments of your peace. Where there is hatred, let us sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is discord, union; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy. Grant that we may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be

understood as to understand; to be loved as to love. For it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned; and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen. (Attributed to Francis of Assisi, ELW, p. 87)

Further Study

James 2:14-20; our responsibility to act in faith

Daily Reading

M. Isaiah 57:14-21

F. Mark 5:21-34

T. 1 Peter 2:18-25

S. Mark 2:13-17

W. Matthew 15:21-28

S. Mark 2:1-12

T. James 5:13-16

Memorization

Mark 2:9

[Jesus said,] "Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Stand up and take your mat and walk'?"