

Mark 2:1-12

2When he returned to Capernaum after some days, it was reported that he was at home. 2So 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. 3Then some people came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them. 4And 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. 5When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, ‘Son, your sins are forgiven.’ 6Now 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?’ 8At 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? 9Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, “Your sins are forgiven”, or to say, “Stand up and take your mat and walk”?’ 10But 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.’ 12And 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!’

Come Expecting to Be Healed

Now I want you to be honest with me and answer me this – and I’ll make it easy for you; raise your hand if you have *not* fallen asleep during a worship service? Don’t be embarrassed. I have. I’ve been to those services where you have that droning organ playing those repetitive hymns, followed by the creeds and the long prayers, and by the time you get to the sermon the pastor sounds like Charlie Brown’s teacher. And maybe the only way you can stay awake is by looking around the church and hopefully noticing something funny, like Mr. Bean in our video, something out of the ordinary, out of the routine that interests you.

And if you’ve ever been to a worship service that has been boring, you probably have asked yourself, “What am I doing here?” I used to be a youth pastor, and a lot of teenagers that I ministered to would give me a very straightforward answer: “My parents make me come.” And if I asked a lot of the parents why *they* come they may say, “Because *my* parents made *me* come.” And so on through several generations. I would guess that many of you are here today *in part* because *your* parents insisted that you go to church.

Of course there are good reasons to go to church; it’s a great place to meet people. If you’re suffering from a lot of guilt church might make you feel better. You might like the coffee. Or you might feel like church gives your life meaning – you get involved in the various ministries and helps you feel good about yourself.

But do you come to church expecting anything amazing to happen? Do you come with anticipation that God may do something fantastic today, here in our midst? Do you come with the faith that a miracle could happen right in front of you? I would venture to say that a lot of our boredom with church may be because we’ve stopped expecting anything wonderful to happen;

we go through the order-of-worship, and often times we're probably asking ourselves, "What's next?" or "How soon until the benediction?" And I wonder if our routines have completely driven God out of our worship services. Sure, there may be hymns that lift our spirits, and maybe something the pastor says will make you nod your head and say, "Amen," but are we open to the unusual, the amazing, the miraculous?

In our Gospel reading today we find Jesus preaching in his own home, and folks have come from all around to hear him. There's probably a lot of talk in the air; "I heard this guy speaks with authority and passion." "This is the son of Mary and Joseph the carpenter." "I've heard that he's even healed some folks and driven out demons." So people wanted to find out what all the buzz was about. And so many people came to hear Jesus that there was no room in the house for anyone to come in. And who should show up but a paralytic carried on a stretcher by four of his friends. And the first thing interesting that happens is actually something that *doesn't* happen; no one clears a way for this paralyzed man and his friends to come into this place of worship. These days there is a big push to make churches accessible to the disabled – we have plans to do so once the city installs a sewer system and we can put in a parking lot so at least the disabled can park their cars before coming into the church. But no one in today's story makes room for the paralyzed man and his friends. So they end up finding their way to the roof of Jesus' house and making a hole in it. Picture this; we're in the midst of worship, I'm giving a sermon, and we start hearing banging above our heads, flecks of dust start to fall from the ceiling, and before you know it we're looking up and seeing the sky, which is great, except that we're in church. The president of trustees is chewing her nails as this guy is lowered in on a stretcher right in front of me. What would we do? What would I do? Would I be so intent on sticking to the order of worship that I would signal to the ushers to carry this man to the back and tell him I'll deal with him after the service? Would I listen to his plea and assure him that we'll put him on our prayer list? And what would you do? Would you be thinking how brash it was for this guy's friends to burrow a hole in our roof? Would you call the police to report property damage and carry the paralytic man outside and wait there until his friends come down, then tell them all to leave? Would we be so set on maintaining the order and structure of our sacred worship service that we would expel anyone or anything that disrupted it?

Well, what does Jesus do?

First of all, Jesus respects the presence of the Holy Spirit in this worship service. In John's Gospel Jesus explains to Nicodemus that the Spirit blows this way and that, and no one knows from whence it comes and where it goes. Well, on this particular day, the Holy Spirit has blown a hole in the sanctuary roof, and rather than try to pretend that it didn't happen Jesus embraces the interruption. There's a story about Wynton Marsalis, the great jazz trumpeter. During one of his concerts someone's cell phone starts ringing while he's playing, and rather than just playing through the distraction as if it wasn't there, Marsalis starts playing the same notes as the ringtone and his entire band embrace the ringtone as part of their music. They own it, just as Jesus owns this interruption in the worship service and makes it a *part of* the worship service.

Second, Jesus recognizes the faith of these men who have gone to extreme measures to give their friend an audience with Jesus. He doesn't look up at the men who have just put a hole in his

roof, shake his fist and say, "I'll see you in court!" He appreciates the passion and determination of these men to help their friend and the faith they must have in Jesus' own abilities.

Third, Jesus sees this as a teaching moment; he says to the man "Your sins are forgiven," which raises the eyebrows of the lawyers in the room who considered Jesus' words blasphemy because only God can forgive sins, and then Jesus proves to them that the man's sins are indeed forgiven because the man is instantly healed. You see, the way the understood things, physical conditions like paralysis were the result of sin, and so the only way that paralysis could be cured would be if the paralyzed person was truly forgiven by God of his sins. The fact that the paralyzed man picks up his mat and walks out was proof that God had indeed forgiven his sins. *Jesus uses this situation to demonstrate his authority, an authority equal to God's.* This astounded the crowd and infuriated the scribes who could not accept that Jesus was in any way connected to God.

Finally, Jesus identifies the immediate need in his midst. I was sharing with our worship planning team this week about my irritation that the emphasis on nearly all of the worship series that our Discipleship Ministries branch develops seem to emphasize discipleship. The current worship series has to do with healing, and the message they want pastors to communicate to their congregations is, "Go out and heal, like Jesus healed." And the problem is that not everyone who comes to church is ready to go out and heal. Not everyone who comes to church is prepared to take on the role of disciple. There are lots of people who come to church who are rather *in need of healing*. So Jesus, who was probably preaching on repentance and the good news that the kingdom of God is upon us, switched his focus to address the immediate need of the man in front of him. He didn't ask for forgiveness, but he was given it, and he was healed of his paralysis without asking to be healed. I wonder how many people come to church for healing only to be told, "Go out and do some work for God." You're not going to be a very effective disciple if you're dealing with your own brokenness. So just as Jesus was able to switch gears and give his attention to the immediate need of this man in front of him, the church too needs to be able to recognize and respond to the needs of the people.

We may be in need of some healing. And we may be in need of some inspiration, some in-flowing of the Holy Spirit to enliven us and to remind us of just how awesome God is and how active he is in our lives. We may need something to happen in our midst, in our worship services, to make us distinctly aware of God's power. But before that happens we need to be open to the unusual, willing to go with the flow when something out-of-the-ordinary takes place in our midst. May God give us the faith to believe that miracles of healing can happen in our midst. And may he give us the courage and trust to acknowledge our own needs in the midst of this loving community. Amen.