

The Capernaum Skylight Company
Mark 2:1-12 2024

Mark 2:1-12 (New Revised Standard Version)

When 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!"

There is a wonderful and very ancient form of prayer-meditation
that has been practiced by Christians since the early Church.
It's called *meditatio Scripturarum* – or meditation on Scripture.

The way it works, is that someone reads a passage very slowly aloud,
and as you listen quietly, you close your eyes & try to relax,
as you prayerfully try to imagine and experience the scene,
attending to every detail as the event unfolds
by placing yourself somewhere within the story.

The first time I learned of this practice, also called *lectio divina*,
was in seminary. This Mark text came alive for me as never before.
I was able to visualize and I even saw myself
as one of the crowd listening to Jesus inside.

He was sitting down teaching and explaining amid those listening.
It was dark and crowded inside a small mud & straw brick house
and someone near the open doorway was repeating what Jesus said
to the larger crowd gathered & listening outside in the street.

Then I heard a thumping and scratching noise from over above me
as dust and bits of straw started to rain down from the ceiling
and then a ray of light streaming down through the falling debris.

Suddenly there were hands tearing open a large hole in the roof.
Interrupted, Jesus stopped speaking and looked up,
as chunks of roofing fell among those of us watching inside.

The house got dark again as a mat or sleeping pallet was dropped down
slowly lowered, passing through the opening in the ceiling
with a spindly and sickly man curled up and lying on it.
It was being lowered by ropes attached to each of the four corners.
Concerned faces looked down as the crowd moved aside to make room,
until it came to rest in front of where Jesus was sitting.

No one said a word, but we all just watched quietly and waited.

Jesus looked up at the 4 men, then looked down at the man on the mat,
and he said to him, (vs. 5) "Son, your sins are forgiven."

Some scribes, easily recognizable for their expensive flowing robes,
were huddled in the corner, and grimaced after Jesus said that,
whispered among themselves, faces hardened & disapproving, vs. 6-7,

Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts, "Why does this fellow speak
in this way? It is blasphemy! Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

Jesus noticed them, and he looked saddened and disappointed, vs. 8-11,

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

But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins" —he said to the
paralytic— "I say to you, stand up, take your mat and go to your home."

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!"

**These four friends of the paralytic at the four corners of the mat
exemplify what it means to be a community of faith, the Church.**

The experience of authentic community is the purpose & blessing
that the Lord intends to accomplish in & through the Church,
which I am increasingly convinced is essential for spiritual health.

We need each other and Jesus calls us to be there for each other.

In the story, four men tore through the roof which made a skylight,
then lowered their paralyzed friend until he's in front of Jesus.

The four men cared enough to put themselves out on his behalf,
overcoming the obstacle of the pressing crowd,
and even climbed up making a hole in the roof,
simply to place their friend in need before Jesus.

And this recently made skylight also filled the house with light.
As a church, a faith-community, this is where God has called us to be,
**& part of our mission as followers of Jesus, this church,
is to build skylights to bring light into dark places.**

These four friends believed,
if they could somehow get their friend to Jesus
that Jesus could make a difference in his life.

And this same skylight also allowed Jesus to see these four men.

Notice that the text begins, vs. 5, **When Jesus saw their faith ...**
They didn't tell Jesus what to do, but with confidence and in hope,
they just laid their friend's problems at the feet of Jesus.

They teamed up to accomplish something for their friend.

They did as a team what none of them could have done individually.

There were obstacles, but cooperating & working together,
these men of faith found a way to overcome the obstacles.

It was the faith of the 4 friends which brought the man to be healed.

God intends that we be supported, strengthened and encouraged
through the faithfulness of an authentic community of faith.
When we are weak, wounded, discouraged and struggling,
faithful others serve as our strength & perseverance.

When these men brought their friend before Jesus to be healed,
I doubt that forgiving the man's sins was anywhere on their agenda.

There has been considerable speculation and many articles written
about why Jesus said, "**Son, your sins are forgiven**",
but within the text itself, it provides no clear explanation.

However, within Mark's story and gospel,
this particular event marks the beginning of the open conflict
between Jesus and the religious authorities that
would eventually lead to his crucifixion and death.
I think that Mark is setting the stage for what was to come.

The story says that first Jesus forgave his sins,
then in dispute with the scribes, and in answer to the scribes,
Jesus simply spoke and then healed the paralytic man,
and **the mat of his suffering became a sign of healing.**

The scribes as religious leaders opposed and resisted Jesus,
because of what they believed and taught about sin and suffering,
that someone's suffering was always the result of their sin.

Their religious law was used to exclude the sick & sinful
as those outside the law – beyond the scope of God's love.

They had their rules, limits and traditions for doing religion,
and they objected when Jesus stepped beyond their boundaries,
for first they wanted to hear repentance and restitution,
before there could be any talk of God's grace & healing.

At this point, still close to the beginning of the Gospel of Mark,
the author chooses to tell this story to illustrate who Jesus is,
that he is the Son of God who has the authority to forgive sin.
Jesus vindicates this claim by healing the paralytic man
as his answer to the scribes' opposition and challenge.

On a deeper level it's not by accident or by coincidence
that the man forgiven and healed was a paralytic in need,
which is can also serve as a metaphor that asks us,
what is it in my life that paralyzes and holds me back?

Lots of things can paralyze our spirits and stymie our full living,
where we remain stuck until accept & receive God's grace & healing,
for we'll just repeat the same dysfunctional patterns
until we will receive and allow God to make us whole.

When our spirits are paralyzed, we need to seek God's grace & healing,
for only God can truly forgive our sin, guilt, regret and shame,
and only God can heal us to take up our mats, to walk and live.

These four friends of the paralytic at the four corners of the mat

exemplify for us, what it means for us to care for one another,
and for us to be an authentic faith community, the Church,
as living signs of God's grace shining out into the world.

These four had compassion enough to put themselves out on his behalf,
overcoming the obstacle of the pressing crowd,
and they even climbed up, making a hole in the roof,
simply to place their friend before Jesus.

Church was being enacted as they cared for their friend in need.

That is our church's continuing task, ministry and mission,
as faithful disciples called to echo Christ's proclamation,
'my child. your sins are forgiven...rise, take up your mat, and walk.'
for that is our Lord's promise of wholeness and our hope.

As the Church of Jesus Christ, so too we are to be to each other
those four friends of the man in need at the corners of the mat,
bringing those in need before Jesus, to heal and make whole,
which happens within faith community that supports such a journey.

Today we celebrate,
and we come to the Lord's Table, a place of grace and family,
- for here, all are loved and welcome, and all are invited by God

into hopeful reconciliation and caring Christian fellowship,
for by God's grace we're all made one... the one body of Christ,
as a visible sign of God's gracious love for all.

At the Table today, let's each seek to discern God's direction anew,
as we are challenged to better fulfill God's purpose for our life.

How can my gifts be used in a meaningful & special way to serve others?
How can I help this church, to be more inviting and welcoming,
and to better reflect God's love and grace out to our world?

How can I better recognize God's gifts and serve human needs?
And what giftedness in others can I affirm and encourage?

**Today, in the abundance of God's Spirit, healing purpose and mercy,
may the Lord do something incredible inside each one of us
that is amazing, wonderful, disturbing and life-changing,**
so that together as family in faith we're making skylights
through which the Light of the world can shine through.

As Paul reminds us in 1st Corinthians,
Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? ... For God's temple is holy,
and you are that temple.