

CALLED TO HEAL

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE Mark 2:1–12

A VERSE TO REMEMBER

Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, “Your sins are forgiven,” or to say, “Stand up and take your mat and walk”? (Mark 2:9)

Daily Bible Readings			
M	Jan. 11	Peace and Healing Will Come	Isaiah 57:14–21
T	Jan. 12	Healed by Christ’s Wounds	1 Peter 2:18–25
W	Jan. 13	Canaanite Daughter Healed by Mother’s Faith	Matthew 15:21–28
Th	Jan. 14	Anoint Sick with Oil and Prayer	James 5:13–16
F	Jan. 15	Woman Healed by Her Faith	Mark 5:21–34
Sa	Jan. 16	The Sick Need a Physician	Mark 2:13–17

STEPPING INTO THE WORD

At three and a half, our granddaughter came to church with us for the first time. Her parents are not church attenders, so she had never seen the interior of a traditional church. I knew she would be fascinated by the organ, and I know Sylvia, the organist, quite well, so after the service I took our granddaughter to meet her.

Sylvia invited our granddaughter to sit beside her on the bench and showed her how the keys, the organ stops, and the foot pedals work. The church was emptying out, so Sylvia let her play a few of the keys and experiment with different sounds.

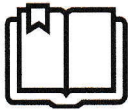
Would Sylvia have been as accommodating to any child who came to take a peek at the organ? Did Sylvia see my love for my granddaughter and honor that love?

In the story of the healing of the paralytic, Jesus sees the faith of the friends who carried the man and worked hard to create a hole in the roof so they could lower him into Jesus’ presence. Jesus tells the man his sins are forgiven and then tells him to stand up and walk. How much of Jesus’ forgiveness and healing extended to this man comes from Jesus’ love for the man himself and how much comes from the friends’ love for the man?

The answer, of course, must be that both played a role and we cannot know the relative weight Jesus put on each one. We do see clearly that our love for others plays a role in their

ability to meet Jesus. We may not have the opportunity to physically carry someone to Jesus, but this lesson gives us the opportunity consider the ways we might bring people into Jesus' presence. Jesus still heals. Jesus still forgives. We have friends and family members who need Jesus' touch. Our concern for them, and the actions we take in response to our concern, make a difference in God's eyes.

God of healing, help us to know how to bring our friends to you when they need your touch. Amen.



SCRIPTURE

Mark 2:1–12

2:1 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!”

Note: Find Scripture Notes for this reading on the final page of the lesson.

AMAZING THINGS

On the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee, Capernaum functioned as the home base for Jesus' ministry. In the early weeks after he called his disciples, Jesus traveled around the Galilee region, preaching, teaching, and healing. He returned

home and stood inside a house, speaking God's word to a big group of people who had crowded into the living areas and spread into the doorway.

Some friends of a man who was paralyzed felt hopeful that Jesus could heal their friend. They were so optimistic that they carried him to the house where Jesus was teaching, and when they encountered the barrier of the crowd of people, they went up onto the roof, hoping to find a way in. The roof material was pliable enough that the friends were able to make a hole in the roof and lower their friend into Jesus' presence. Because he saw the faith of the man's friends, Jesus greets the man with a statement of forgiveness.

The religious leaders present in the house became incensed at the blasphemy of Jesus' words of forgiveness, thinking, "Who can forgive sins but God alone?" (Mark 2:7). Sensing their questioning, Jesus replied with a question of his own: "Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Stand up and take your mat and walk?'" (v. 9).

In one sense, Jesus' question has a straightforward answer. Whether or not healing happens can be seen visibly, so in that sense, words of healing are more difficult than words of forgiveness, the result of which is invisible. In another sense, however, both statements are very hard to say. Being a physical healer is a rare gift and subject to proof, while being able to truly forgive another person's sins is only God's work.

Jesus continued to address the scribes' skepticism by saying that he would demonstrate his power to forgive by showing his power to heal. He told the paralyzed man to get up, pick up his mat, and go home, and the man is able to do so.

We can imagine that the man's friends ran down from the roof and greeted their friend with joy as he emerged from the house, walking and carrying his mat. They were overjoyed and amazed. Mark records that the people who saw this healing "were all amazed and glorified God, saying, 'We have never seen anything like this!'" (v. 12).

What did they see that was new? A man healed from paralysis. A preacher who linked healing with forgiving sins and said he could do both.

? If you had been present for this event, what would have seemed the most amazing to you?

HEALING AND FORGIVENESS OF SINS

This story raises many questions. Some of them are purely logistical. What was that roof made of? Some scholars say tiles, some say dried mud and straw, but either way, how did these friends create a hole big enough to lower a man down without dropping large amounts of material on the people below? They must have used rope to lower their friend. Did they bring it with them? Find it on the roof?

Other questions relate to the setting inside that crowded house. What was it like down below when the roof was being dismantled? And did Jesus read the minds of the religious leaders, or did he know they were questioning because of their grumpy facial expressions?

One big question relates to the connection between forgiveness of sins and healing. In Jesus' time, people commonly assigned blame for illness and disability by trying to out who sinned to cause it. When he heals a blind man in John 9:1-3, Jesus makes it clear that the man's blindness was not caused by anyone's sin. However, when Jesus heals the man beside the Pool of Bethesda, he later tells the man not to sin any more so that nothing worse will happen to him (John 5:14).

Apart from this incident in Capernaum and the healing at the Pool of Bethesda, healings in the gospels are not linked with sin. Instead healings and other miracles are presented as evidence of Jesus' authority (Mark 1:27) and signs that the Kingdom of God is here. In the Gospel of John, the word "sign" is used to refer to miracles and healings which point to Jesus as God with us, bringing fullness of life.

Another major question raised by the passage concerns the connection between the faith of the paralyzed man's friends and his healing. Jesus saw the faith of the friends and healed the man, providing an intriguing model for us. Our own faith truly does have an impact on the people in our lives.

The Gospel writers often say that people were "amazed" by Jesus' miracles (Matt. 12:23; Mark 2:12; 5:20; 6:51). The word *amazed* means "to be thrown from a fixed position." The miracles, in other words, caused cognitive dissonance, forcing viewers to rethink who Jesus was. Who is Jesus in this passage? Healer. Forgiver. One who sees the faith of friends. One who confronts opposition boldly. Every time we meet Jesus in a gospel story, we are encouraged to rethink the way we view him.

? What aspects of this story cause cognitive dissonance for you and encourage you to rethink the way you view Jesus? What aspects of this story encourage you to care for friends differently?

STEPPING INTO THE WORLD

Called to be a healer, Jesus welcomes us as participants in his healing ministry. He invites us to be open to healing in our own lives, and he loves for us to bring people we care about to him. Prayer is a major way that we can bring our friends and family members to Jesus.


Picture in your mind those persistent friends of the paralyzed man. They carried their friend, climbed stairs or a ladder to the roof, scrabbled around creating a hole in the roof, and painstakingly lowered him to the room below where Jesus was teaching. In the same way, persistence in prayer for those in need of healing or forgiveness can have a variety of components. Sometimes we pray for people we love in their presence and other times when they are not present. We can write prayers in a journal or pray with the words to a praise song or hymn.

We so easily get stuck in a rut in our prayers. All prayer is good, even when it's a bit routine, but creativity in prayer can help us persist in praying. The creativity of these devoted friends as they confronted obstacles reminds us to think outside the box when we want to bring loved ones to Jesus.

We also bring people into Jesus' presence with our actions and words. Jesus is always present with the people we love, so perhaps a more accurate way to describe the goal of our helpful words and actions is for them to remind people that God is with them. A meal, card, phone call, text message, flowers . . . many concrete actions and gifts communicate our love and God's love and may help people become more aware of God's presence and more open to God's healing. When a friend of mine had cancer, I sent her a postcard with a scripture verse every week for more than year. She says those postcards reminded her of God's presence and helped her trust God for healing.

We can also bring people into God's presence and participate in Jesus' call to join him in the ministry of healing by listening deeply. The challenge is to listen without giving advice. If you ask people with chronic illnesses what are some of the challenges they face, you'll hear in many cases that unsolicited advice is deeply painful.

Prayer, acts of kindness, words of love, and careful listening are some of the ways we can bring people in the presence of Jesus, the Healer, the Compassionate One.

 **What are some of the ways you bring people into Jesus' presence? In what ways would you like to do it more often or more effectively?**

SCRIPTURE NOTES

The following notes provide additional information about today's Scripture that may be helpful for your study.

1. Capernaum, rather than Jesus' hometown of Nazareth or the capital city of Jerusalem, served as headquarters for Jesus' ministry. It is possible that it was Jesus' own roof that was removed by the friends of the paralyzed man. The roof was likely a mat of reeds, clay/mud, and pebbles that were rolled smooth on top of the roof beams.
2. Village houses of the time had flat roofs that were often used as an outside room. They were covered with clay bricks or tiles and would be accessible by ladder.
3. Jesus first forgave the paralyzed man's sin. Then, when he sensed the scribes pondering whether this might be blasphemy, he pointed out that the Son of Man has the power to forgive sin. He healed the paralyzed man as evidence of his authority to forgive sin in order to dismiss the scribes' questioning.
4. In prior healing stories, Jesus restored physical health to those whose conditions separated them from the human community. In this story, he forgave sin, which separates people from relationship with God.