

A Word from our General Presbyter

Ed Thompson

Three times a year the executives of the presbyteries in our Synod get together. I enjoy the fellowship, and it is fascinating to see how much we have in common. I usually come away inspired by how well my colleagues are facing the various challenges before them, as well as feeling grateful that I am in the Presbytery of West Virginia rather than somewhere else. We may have our problems, but in comparison, we are doing pretty well.

The last time we met, however, the best part of our meeting was the Bible Study that we did together. At the beginning of each day we spent time reflecting on the story in Mark 2 where Jesus heals a paralyzed man whose friends had lowered him through the roof in order to get him to Jesus. It is a rich passage.

Two things stood out for me. One was the zeal or passion of the paralyzed man's friends. They were willing to get up on the roof. This probably meant getting some kind of ladder as well as hauling him up there. It seems like a lot of work. Plus, they were willing to dig through the roof in order to get him to Jesus. Now roofs back then may not have been as sturdy or as well constructed as they are today. Nevertheless, this cannot have been easy. It's a wonder nobody tried to stop them. It's a wonder Jesus didn't try to stop them. The passage says Jesus was at home, so this was apparently his house or maybe his mother's house. I can imagine him yelling "Hey, what are you guys doing up there?" when he hears a noise coming from the roof or when clumps of dirt start falling from the ceiling. That doesn't happen.

You have to admire the persistence as well as the creativity of these people. As we talked about this, I began to wonder: where do we see that kind of persistence, that kind of passion today? People get all worked up about sports. Do we get worked up about anything in the church? Maybe if a pastor tries something new, people will grumble "We've never done it that way before." But do we show, or are we willing to show, the same kind of zeal or passion to bring people to Jesus? I think that's a question we need to ask ourselves.

The other thing that stood out for me is: what gets in the way of our seeing Jesus? In the passage, it's the crowds. In my case, I was thinking it would be meetings or maybe email. I get so caught up in my work and the things I need to do – or think I need to do – that I lose sight of Jesus.

When I teach officer training, one of the things I point out to people is that the first and the last questions we ask of all our officers have to do with Jesus. (Do you trust in Jesus Christ your Savior, acknowledge him Lord of all and head of the church, and through him believe in one God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost? In your ministry will you try to show the love and justice of Jesus Christ?) I think that is intentional. From beginning to end, our work in the church is all about Jesus. Sometimes we forget that. More often, we allow ourselves to be distracted by paying the bills, putting on well-intentioned programs, focusing on what we need to do to get through the church year. You could say we forget about Jesus or we lose track of Jesus. At any rate, we're not able to see Jesus. That's sad as well as scary.

What gets in the way of your seeing Jesus? What are you willing to do to bring people to Jesus? Where do you see yourself in that story? (It's Mark 2:1-12)