

“Forgiveness Breaking Through to Heal and Raise Up”
based on Mark 2:1-12, David Jahnke, 2/8/15

Did you know that Jesus had a home in Capernaum? When I read that Jesus came home to Capernaum, I was surprised. Jesus, after all, was from Nazareth. And then after saying he had come home, it mentions his being at a house. The clear implication is that the house was his home. Now he did not use it much once he started his ministry but still, he had his own home. This sheds light on today’s passage. Because it was Jesus’ roof which was being destroyed by the four men! [N.T.Wright’s The Gospel for Everyone, Mark 2:1-12]

The scene itself is really dramatic. Can you imagine being at Jesus’ little home to hear him teach and all of a sudden you hear and see this scratching and digging on the roof above Jesus? Jesus looks up and they break through and stuff from the roof falls on top of him. They keep breaking their way in until they are able to lower a paralyzed man down in front of Jesus. What is going on and how will he respond to this really, quite outrageous, public violation?

I don’t know if the others just hopped on down through the hole or they came around and people finally made room for them. But Jesus looked at them all and saw their faith in him and their love of the man and he then he told the *paralyzed man* that his sins were forgiven. Why him? It must have been the men who made the choice to take him up on the roof and dig through.

Jesus said the paralyzed man’s sins were forgiven because he was the one who needed to hear it. He was the one whose life had been crippled by a fallen world; the one who wondered if God loved him since he had to suffer every day as he did.

Someone wrote to me this week about a bit of faith crisis due to feeling unworthy. I do not know if she had done something particularly bad or did many things wrong; probably something since we all tend to mess up quite regularly.

But it was not God who was making her feel unworthy. It was not Jesus who kept the men from bringing their friend in the front door. It was a selfish, uncompassionate and judgmental crowd. But that did not get them down; they kept pressing forward and even sinned to see Jesus. And even after their sin, Jesus forgave and restored him.

So it is not God who made my friend feel unworthy. It's a selfish, uncompassionate, judgmental world that did. God made her wonderfully and beautifully. God restored that wonder and beauty in Christ Jesus. And because of His work, she is under grace not law; under God's covenant of mercy, not any demands of perfection and judgments that come when we fall short.

The same goes for all of you who have come to this house of Jesus just like those men did. Some arrive here joyfully in plenty of time to hear a Word; some arrive just in time after a stressful start to the morning; some of us are carried in by parents or spouses or by the urging of the Spirit. But we are all here in the hope of healing and grace.

So may you meet Jesus here every time you come— in the smiling faces of others; in the wonder of children; in the beautiful music and in the Word read and proclaimed. The Son of God is present in Spirit and body! But some of you may not be convinced.

Some people at Jesus' house were not convinced. After Jesus forgave the man's sins, the teachers of the Law grumbled to each other, questioning Jesus' authority to forgive sins. After all, only God could forgive sins and through the proper channels— that is through the temple. Who was this radical non-priest who had the gall to speak on behalf of God and tell sinners they would not have to face justice?

I read a story about a skeptical young Russian in a commentary by Rowan Williams called Meeting God in Mark:

“The young man...was persuaded to attend a camp for young Russians and he [went to] an address by a celebrated and very saintly orthodox theologian. The address infuriated and disgusted him, and he went home, determined to confirm for himself the emptiness and stupidity of Christianity by reading the gospels. He chose to start with Mark simply because it was the shortest. Now from the memoir of the young man whose name was Anthony Bloom:

‘The feeling I had occurs sometimes when you are walking along in the street, and suddenly you turn around because you feel someone is looking at you. While I was reading, before I reached the beginning of the third chapter (which interestingly is about where we are...), I suddenly became aware that on the other side of my desk there was a Presence...I realized immediately: if Christ is standing here alive, that means he is the risen Christ.’”

In the midst of this man's anger and doubt and his desire to refute Christ Jesus, that was when Christ graciously presented himself to him. And over time, this man became responsible for introducing tens or hundreds of thousands of Westerners to the Russian Orthodox tradition of prayer. [From Rowan Williams' Meeting God in Mark, pp. 4-5]

There have been a few times in my life where I had the most profound sense of God's presence *after* transgressing in one way or another, just as these men did. This makes little sense as sin, by definition, should separate us from God. But sometimes God's presence is the most tangible after sin.

Notice how Jesus did not do anything to stop the transgression happening above him. He waited patiently for them to break through. Jesus often waits patiently for others, even as they sin, knowing that this may lead to a breakthrough in which they finally recognize their need for mercy.

Paul wrote that, "...where sin increased, grace abounded all the more." Jesus said the sinner often enters the Kingdom before the righteous. Recalling our sins should not make us feel unworthy. Instead it should drive us back to God who will shower us with love and mercy; not that we might wander off again but that we might want to stay with Him and have a relationship with God which we call prayer.

Jesus not only patiently waits for and always forgives us; he went a step further—he took those sins upon himself. Everything in today's passage heralds the end of Jesus' ministry. *He* broke into and seemingly violated the house of God in Jerusalem, turning over the tables of money changers and salesmen. The temple leaders and lawyers again questioned his authority and again he spoke cryptically about the authority of the Son of Man. [N.T. Wright's The Gospel for Everyone, Mark 2:1-12]

And when they crucified him anyway, he carried all humankind, crippled and paralyzed by sin, into the depths of the temple— into the holiest of holies— God's very presence. Like the men who broke their way into Jesus' home, he trusted his gut regarding his Father's love. And he found in His Father's Presence the mercy that he had shared with others throughout his life.

But the man was not just forgiven, he was restored.

I was at the house of someone crippled by very difficult circumstances this week. She has been dealing with leaks in her roof and she will soon have to leave the house due to foreclosure. She told me about her imprisoned husband who works in the chapel of the prison. During Advent, he was moving a box with the creche in it. A crèche is a nativity scene for any of you who are not from this area.

The box was not sealed well on the bottom and one of pieces fell through and broke. And of all the pieces to break, it happened to be baby Jesus. His fellow inmates gave him a hard time about breaking Jesus. And he joked that he does miracles and he went to get glue from his locker. They could not believe he had glue there but he pieced Jesus back together.

Jesus broke through the roof of God's temple with the weight of the world on his back. The veil in front of the holy of holies was torn at Jesus' death. And after his body was crippled and finally shattered, God's Spirit came down and pieced him back together and once again filled him with the breath of life. This is how far God goes to reveal the depths of His mercy; his communion with us even in our broken-ness; his willingness to completely restore us and welcome us into His eternal presence.

May this family whose life has been shattered be restored once again by the resurrection power of God's Spirit.

And you all, knowing how much God wants to welcome, heal and grace you how far will you go? Will you let others crowd you out and criticize and condemn? Will you let busy-ness keep you from discipleship? Will you think your sin is greater than God's mercy? Or will you trust what Jesus revealed time and again in his ministry and in his death and resurrection? Will you grow the faith that opens you to Jesus' constant presence through climbing to God in prayer and digging deep into God's Word? He wants to welcome you every day and drive out all that is weighing you down and crippling your Spirit. He wants to completely restore you and fill you with new life. God stir us all to follow the example of these five wonderful friends...

