

“Through the Roof!”

Jesus was in Capernaum, which at that point was “home” for Him. Already He is gaining in popularity. Jesus is teaching on a particular day in a home. The little house is packed with people, and people are jammed around the doorway entrance, trying to peek in.

A paralyzed man is being brought to the house, carried on a mat by 4 friends. They wanted to get to Jesus, but how? There is no space to push through the crowd. Then they got an idea! They were able to climb onto the roof. They begin to make a hole in the flat roof. In Palestine, roofs were made of saplings laid flat, with branches and twigs spread over them, and clay patted down over the structure and baked in the sun.

Imagine the scene! Jesus is teaching the Word of God. People begin to hear voices outside the house, then sounds on the roof. Bits of dirt and twigs begin to break loose and come down on people. I wonder how long Jesus continued to speak? When I am in the middle of a sermon I am often kind of oblivious to what else is going on. I’ve had people pass out, or get sick – and I am so engrossed in preaching that it took a while to become aware of what was going on. I sometimes think that it would be possible for pregnant ladies to have a baby, or a man might be choking to death, and I’d be preaching away, pretty much unaware of what’s happening!

Anyhow, more and more dirt starts coming down. Perhaps some of the twigs and dirt land on top of Jesus’ head. People are wondering, “What in the world...?” Then a small hole appears in the ceiling. People are looking up, perhaps their eyes meet the eyes of someone on the roof peeping through the hold. The opening gets bigger and bigger. “Watch out! Easy now! Don’t drop him!” Slowly they lower the paralyzed man onto the floor in front of Jesus.

Such a commotion! People push and shove to make room for the sick man on the cot. Maybe some are squeezed out the door. People are jibber-jabbering. Someone grumbles, “What nerve! Tearing the roof apart!” Finally, the crowd settles down. It’s quiet. All eyes are on the paralyzed man lying on the cot, and on Jesus!

Then Jesus speaks: “When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, ‘Son, your sins are forgiven’” (Mark 2:5). “Your sins are forgiven”? Why would Jesus say that? The man is paralyzed! He came to be healed! There are “scribes” present – experts in the Jewish law. They are upset, furious, and mumble to themselves: “Why does this fellow speak in this way? It is blasphemy. Who can forgive sins but God alone?” (Mark 2:7). Jesus sense what they are thinking. He responds, “Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Stand up and take your mat and walk?’” (verse 9). The story continues: “‘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!’” (Mark 2:10-12).

There are many healing stories in the Bible. Someone has estimated that 20% of the gospel narratives are devoted to healing. But I love this story! There are some things that stand out in *this story!*

First, there is Jesus' response to the paralyzed man. “Son, your sins are forgiven” (Mark 2:5). Isn't that weird! He's paralyzed. He came for healing. Why did Jesus say that? We can't be 100% sure. Maybe Jesus is keeping in mind the view of sickness common among Jews at that time. They believed there was a direct connection between *sin* and *sickness*. If you were sick, it was because of some sin in your life. The rabbis had a saying: “There is no sick man healed of his sickness until all his sins have been forgiven him.”

Now Jesus elsewhere taught that this is *not true*. The 9th chapter of John's gospel tells the story of a man born blind. Jesus' disciples ask Him who sinned – that man, or his parents – that he was born blind. Jesus' answer? “Neither.” Sickness is a part of life because we live in a sinful, fallen world. God doesn't punish us with sickness because of some sin we do. If that were true, we'd all be sick! So maybe Jesus is playing along with this common view of that time, and saying, “OK. It makes no difference to Me whether I say, “Your sins are forgiven” or “Take up your mat and walk.” *I have power to forgive sins and to heal paralyzed people!* (The scribes are incensed over this. Only God can forgive sins, they reason, so Jesus is claiming to be God!)

But I wonder if there isn't another explanation why Jesus says to the man, “Your sins are forgiven.” *Maybe Jesus could see that the root cause of this man's paralysis was not merely a physical problem, but an emotional or spiritual issue.*

We now know that many physical illnesses are rooted in emotional or spiritual dis-ease or dysfunction. For example, physicians tell us how harmful *stress* can be to our physical well-being. It can cause high blood pressure, or make us more vulnerable to certain diseases (like cancer). Things like anger and resentment can have harmful effects on our body. Ever see someone get so angry their face gets red? Anxiety, a negative outlook, are not conducive to good health. How about kids who make themselves sick in the stomach worrying about a test in school or something else happening in school that day? In my dating years I had this problem that if I were on a date, anytime I got something to eat, I would feel sick in the stomach. It was a kind of panic attack. It was embarrassing, to say the least! Of course, once I got married I got over that! I have no problem eating now!

The ancient Hebrews were quite modern and ahead of their time in that they saw humans as a unity of body, mind and spirit. Dysfunction in one area can spill over and affect the other.

Jesus came to bring healing to people in every dimension of life! Not just healing *physically* (although He did heal physically ill people). Jesus came to make us whole in every facet of our life! In fact, the word “salvation” in the Bible carries with it the idea of health or wholeness.

There are many ways that we can be lacking in the wholeness that God intends. *Emotional problems* – depression, anxiety attacks. *Addictions* – alcohol, drugs, sex, food, temper. *Emotional wounds and scars* – feelings of rejection, being unloved, low self-esteem. Perhaps wounds that go back to our childhood, where we didn't get our emotional needs met by our parents, or we were hurt along the way by someone important in our life. Jesus came to heal us in our *relationships* – the friendship gone sour. A marriage on the rocks. Someone cut off from

the rest of the family. *Grief and loss* – a grief never healed. A loss in our life that we never got over. *Our attitudes* – we are always so negative, picky, critical. Or we're a constant complainer. Or we have an unforgiving spirit. We may be sick in the *spiritual dimension* of life – we are far from God. We lost our faith (or never had it). A moral failure that needs to be forgiven. There are so many ways we need the healing of Jesus!

I saw a cartoon that shows this long line of people waiting to be healed by Jesus. One man, carrying a piece of electronic equipment yells out: "Lord, could you program my VCR!" (We don't use VCR's much anymore – but I can imagine someone yelling out, "Lord, could you program my thermostat!" or "Lord, could you set up my smart phone!").

Where do you and I, (and the world), need the healing that only Christ can give? Jesus could say to the paralyzed man both "Your sins are forgiven", and "Take up your mat and walk."

The most important healing is that we be in a right relationship with God. All the other kinds of healing that we need are secondary compared to this! When our relationship with God is healed, this often has positive affect on our *physical* wellbeing. 269 physicians were once surveyed. Of those 269, 99% said they were convinced that religious belief has a healing effect on patients. That was 20% higher than the figure for the general public! 75% of these doctors testified to their belief in the healing power of intercessory prayer. Jesus came to make us whole in every dimension: physically/emotionally/spiritually.

Something else about this fascinating healing story in Mark 2: ***Other people had a part to play in this man's healing.*** This guy was fortunate enough to have 4 friends who cared enough to carry him to Jesus!

God is the One who heals, but He often uses people to help accomplish that! God uses doctors, nurses, medical technicians, dentists, physical therapists to heal. God uses marriage and family therapists, psychologists, psychiatrists. I did my training to be a marriage and family therapist at (what was then) the Marriage Council of Philadelphia. We had a skilled psychiatrist and practicing therapists on the teaching staff. I gained a new appreciation for how God uses people like this to heal people. Sometimes God uses caring family members, friends, neighbors to steer us in the right direction so we can be healed. I think of people in *support groups* helping one another find healing. I spoke several years ago to a group of parents who had lost children. They were part of a support network that would meet on a monthly basis. The pain and anguish that these people felt was evident in that meeting. They are helping one another heal.

It might be just that word of encouragement, that listening ear, that suggestion a friend makes, that helps someone in a time when healing is needed. Can you think of people who have "carried you to Jesus" so you could experience the Lord's healing? Someone who was there for you in a time of need? Are you willing to ask God to use you to lead others to a healing Christ? In our monthly healing services, even your standing by someone, laying a gentle hand on his or her shoulder, can be a way of doing that!

One final thought on this story of the man let down through the roof. *Nothing kept him and his friends from getting the attention of Jesus!* Not the crowd. Not a bunch of grumbling scribes. Not a solid roof. Are you and I willing to go to the limit in order to get healing where we need it? Are we willing to let nothing stand in the way of our finding the healing of Jesus?

What are some of things we have to “cut through” to experience greater wholeness? Maybe the embarrassment of admitting we have a problem. Maybe the negative attitudes we have against psychiatrists or counselors. Maybe its our busyness: we know there are problem areas but we are just too busy to address them. Maybe it’s our doubt: “I don’t think I’ll ever get well.” Maybe our pride: “I’d never come to the altar and ask people to pray for my healing.” (Often it’s harder to get men to come into counseling than it is women. Or, perhaps we’re too proud to make the first move to mend a broken relationship. Maybe we are into denial: “I’m fine. There’s nothing wrong with me.”

The paralyzed man and his friends didn’t let anything stop them from getting to Jesus! Jesus saw their faith, and determination, and He honored it! He forgave the man’s sins and healed his paralysis!

That same Jesus is alive today! He is here! He came to bring “salvation”, wholeness, to each of us, and to His world.

*Harry L. Kaufhold, Jr.
Community United Methodist Church
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