

Lenten Devotional February 22, 2024

Scripture

Mark 2:1-12

1 When he returned to Capernaum after some days, it was reported that he was at home. 2 So 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. 3 Then some people came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them. 4 And 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. 5 When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven." 6 Now 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?" 8 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? 9 Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Stand up and take your mat and walk'? 10 But 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." 12 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!"

Devotion

The Rev. Kristen Renee Barner '97

I have always read this story as Jesus *proving* he has the same authority as God has, specifically to forgive sins. Today, for me, this reads differently.

In 2017 I had a spinal stroke which left me partially paralyzed. I have become increasingly and acutely aware of places and locations that comply with ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) laws and those that do not. I have discovered what it is to be marginalized and disqualified simply for my inability to traverse this land as "normal" people do. Suddenly, in this passage from Mark, I'm the one on the stretcher. And I'm lucky because like this man in the stretcher, I have proactive and loving people surrounding me. I've no doubt they'd remove a patch of roof and haul me where I need to be. (How come we never talk about those people in this story?)

The first thing Jesus does is tell the man, "Your sins are forgiven" (2:5). The religious leaders lose their minds and Jesus says, "Fine, fine . . . and stand up, take your mat and go home." Jesus asks the religious folks which might be easier to say, and therefore accomplish: forgiveness or physical healing? Jesus offers forgiveness first. What I see is that Jesus' first interaction with the paralyzed man is to recognize him not for his disabilities, but for his worth and value as a human being. Beyond his paralysis, the man is recognized as a HUMAN BEING WORTHY OF FORGIVENESS! Oh, yeah, and stand up and walk . . . almost as an afterthought, to further prove his power.

When we meet one another, let's start with the place of recognizing the humanity of each other. Please, unless you have a handicap placard, leave those blue parking spaces for people who need it. Also, find people who will remove a patch of roof for you so you can go where you need to go. We really need those people in our lives.

Prayer

O God, teach us to begin with humanity. Teach us to live in the spirit of saying to one another: “the divine in me sees the divine in you.” Encourage us to proactively care for one another, to cut away the patch of roof and to offer praise and thanks when we recognize that we live in a place of forgiveness. Amen.