

“Tearing Off the Roof”
Mark 2: 1 – 12
Makemie Presbyterian Church
February 8, 2009

2When 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!”

This ends the reading.

Right off the bat in Mark 1:1 the reader is immediately told that the Book is the Gospel of Jesus Christ, or the good news.

And the text that Ted just read about the "Paralytic" is a miracle story with important implications for telling the good news of Jesus. A miracle story displays that Jesus is one who can heal the sick; a very important piece of news if Jesus is indeed the Messiah. Because either Jesus is the Son of God or Jesus is a blasphemer. What we will talk about this morning is the relationship of Jesus ministry of healing & why the scribes would oppose his work. Within this story is also a controversy dialogue where Jesus confronts the scribes. And this dialogue settles the matter of whether Jesus is a blasphemer or one given authority or power over sin on earth, a prerogative assigned to God.

We have a healing story that is placed around the controversy dialogue with the scribes. It tells like the story of a child because it doesn't tell us exactly what's going on. What was really dramatic to this story teller was the tension that occurred when the ones who "always argued among themselves" encountered Jesus.

Our text is preceded by the cleansing of a leper (Mark 1:40-45); which is also a puzzling story because the leper does not keep it a secret as asked. We're told that because of this Jesus could not enter the city; the reason is not clear but it seems to be due to the number of people seeking him out. Next is the tale of the healing of the paralytic carried by four (Mark 2:1-12). Here we encounter the scribes who may also be the reason he could not enter the town openly.

So our story is preceded by a healing story. That ground has been covered but now the teller adds a twist. As much we might want to be amazed by the healing we can't help but be confounded by the controversy. Mark chooses not to tell us why the adults are fighting and the story leaves an almost invisible question mark in the air. If a child were telling this story, there would certainly be a very visible question mark. Why are those men arguing? Why would they not want the sick man healed? Why do they dislike him? Can't they see everyone is happy? Why are they frowning? Why are they missing it?

Why could the four not get to Jesus? Is this some sort of group decision to cause Jesus to do something dramatic? Is the paralytic being lowered through the roof to somehow keep him from having time to react? The scene is dramatic and puzzling. There are many

voices we don't hear. For instance the house owner would have been upset by the tearing up of his roof.

As with many of Jesus' healing stories the importance of faith for healing is present. It is hard for our modern ears to hear that "because of their faith" they were healed. In this case because of their faith Jesus appears to take notice of them. Is this to say that without faith we're not noticed? Of course we all have doubts, will this prevent our healing?

The opposition of the scribes & the authority of Jesus are repeated in each of the regions Jesus visits. In our text this morning Jesus confronts the scribes, heals the sick & announces himself the Son of Man. Jesus takes over the scribes' domain & acts in the prerogatives of God.

"I never saw that before." Mark is a Gospel with a unique tone. It is a heavy, action-packed story with a lot of emotion. The local boy turned healer is in town & he's speaking at a local house. Word has spread ahead of time & the place is packed. The door is jammed with folks. Four people come bearing a paralytic & they're so intent that when they can't get in the door they start tearing up the roof. Will you imagine this scene with me? People are packed into this home.

They've been told about this miracle man & they've come. It's so packed & the energy is so high that when four people climb the roof nobody notices & when they tear the roof off it doesn't cause a ripple. Jesus notices their faith & then talks to the paralytic saying, "Your sins are forgiven."

Now we are told here in the middle of the story about a group of folks that are present. The scribes. They are Jesus' protagonists throughout the book of Mark. Now grammatically this section is set apart from the rest of the passage. This is our clue how important this part is & that the author wants us to pay attention. Then the scribes accuse Jesus of being a blasphemer.

Scribes are the legal authorities of their day. And while we're used to Jesus being a part of the Trinity; it was not so, of course during his time and the claim to forgive sins & to heal was God's job description. Now listen, this is important, if Jesus is not the one true God, he is a blasphemer by Jewish law. No one but God can forgive sins. His is a radical claim. And there, listening, are the legal experts the "local authorities".

To add insult to injury to the scribes Jesus lays claim to authority & claims it through healing the paralytic. It's radical it's

daring, he's challenging the authorities right to their faces. And the people say, "I never saw that before. "

It's revealed a little when Jesus knows that they argue in their hearts. And then he points out the issues involve & asks them to pick which is "the better trouble." As if to say, "Am I a blasphemer for forgiving sins if I heal this man?"

When we meet Jesus in Mark's Gospel, we don't just meet a suffering servant. We don't just meet a child in a manger we meet a man of action who is God & is willing to act in the authority of God by confronting his enemies face to face. Jesus made them a witness to his authority. If they saw what had happened then by their legal process they had to give him credit; even if they hadn't seen that before. Jesus is turning things around on the scribes. He's taking the fight right to them. Maybe he's trying to win them over with their own methods. Jesus heals the paralytic while in mid-sentence with the scribes. And the crowds say "I never saw that before".

I can't help but to wonder how many of us are arguing in our hearts. Do we see Jesus as the one true God? Or do we tuck him away as a teacher & healer? By the rules of his time he would either have to be God or he would have to be a blasphemer. It is important

to realize this & to realize that he was not immediately put on trial. Popular apologist C.S. Lewis in his book *Mere Christianity* makes the point clear. Jesus is either God or a raving lunatic. It's one of my fears that like the scribes we're often too afraid of the implications of what Jesus does to accept who he is. We don't want to lose authority. We want to continue as the captains of our own souls. But Mark with hand firmly planted on his hip is grabbing our collars asking us to pay attention to the important part. Jesus is God.

In the Gospel of Mark this is a powerful story told of a paralytic. Four men, bring a man, who was paralyzed, to the feet of Jesus, but they can't go through the front door. They literally have to tear the roof off.

In the Roman culture of the day, the paralytic was a man who was considered to be of diminished capacity. They looked at his outward appearance & made an inward assessment based upon the way he looked. He couldn't have the favor of God. And because he didn't have the favor of God & because of his diminished capacity, he didn't, obviously, have any type of health care nor could he work; all of this was working against him. Yet four men are willing to bring this one man to Jesus.

Four men, each person has a corner, in reference to carrying this man to Jesus. They are carrying his mat. What I like about these men is that there doesn't seem to be any fighting over who has the best corner. Each person has a corner. Somebody is working the north side, someone is working the south side, someone is working the east side, someone is working the west side. They weren't caught up in "corner conflict." When the church begins to understand that everyone has a particular mission & a gift, work your particular corner whatever your church may be. If it's Methodist, if it's Presbyterian, if it's Baptist, work your particular corner.

If you are a person of diminished capacity, do you really care where that person comes from? Whether they're UCC, UMC, PC (U.S.A.)? Whether they are from AT&T or if they have ADD, you really don't care. You just want that person to bring you into the presence of God. But the peculiar thing about this text in Mark is that these men who are bringing this man to Jesus cannot get in through the front door because all of the church people are in the way & they refuse to move from their seats. Yet, they're so creative that these men are willing to go up on the roof & literally tear the roof off. We know that there are people who don't recognize or come into contact

with God through front door ministries. Some people come through the back door, some come through the window, some come through the roof. Sometimes we idolize our methods but forget about the message.

Let me see if I can break it down so everybody understands what I'm trying to say. Not too long ago people used to listen to music on a 78. There are some people out there who listened to music, who remember it on a 45. Some on a 33. And there are some people with 8-track tapes. You still have them in your basement. Then there are some with an LP. There are a few with cassettes. Now we have CDs, DVDs & MP3s. The beautiful thing about all of these different methods, the wonderful thing about all of these different methods, is that I can play the song "Amazing Grace" on a 78, a 45, a 33, an 8-track, an LP, a CD, a cassette, a DVD or an MP3! It's the same song but a different method of delivery. Part of our problem, I think, is that we have 8-track churches in a CD world & we're slow to shift the methods so a new generation can connect with God.

We see in our text that this man; now at the feet of Jesus & he's about to be transformed as a result of this encounter because some people were willing to bring him to Christ. Now one of the powerful

things in this text is when Jesus goes through the healing process of saying, “Yours sins are forgiven.” He then says, “Rise up & walk, and take up your mat & go on home.” What's powerful in the text is that he does not just tell him get up & walk. He says “Get up & take your mat & go home.”

In other words, if you were to just get up & walk, if people were to see you, they'd think you've always been someone who lived at your full human potential. But literally he says to take your mat—your stretcher—put it under your arm & walk home. When you connect with someone, someone will raise the question, “Why do you have that stretcher under you arm?” You might say to that individual,

“I bumped into a man by the name of Jesus. I met him by four friends because I was paralyzed. I bring my infirmities with me wherever I go so that I can share with people the power & the love of God.”

This is a portion of our call; that whatever the method, we make sure we have the same message. Even though it was considered blasphemy by the early Jewish scribes, Jesus is God. That's our message this morning, Jesus is God. Amen.