

## Sermon Mark 2:1-12

### The New Story

FMC January 31, 2021



I'm delighted to be with you this morning. It is good to share worship with you in person. We wait for the time when we can meet more freely and in larger numbers once again. We wait for the cases of COVID 19 to go down so that we can meet in each other's home, at church potlucks, at funerals and birthday parties. We wait for the isolation to stop so that we can visit face to face with our loved ones. We wait for winter months to pass so that we can take a picnic to the riverbank again.

This waiting reminds me of being out in a sail boat in the middle of the lake – but there is no wind to sail us back to shore.

### Prayer

Loving God help us to hear your good news today. Transform us into your Son's likeness through the winds of your good news. Amen

### Introduction

Today's gospel story comes from the book of Mark. Mark was probably the first gospel to be written. He collected the stories and teachings of Jesus and

organized them into a narrative. He grouped together stories with similar messages.

For example, in chapters 2 to 3:6 there are five stories of Jesus in conflict with the religious leaders. Note that the conflict is never with the people, but always with those who in power. In today's story, there is quiet grumbling by the scribes. This is followed by a story of Jesus and his disciples eating with tax collectors and sinners. Here the disciples are interrogated about Jesus actions. There is short parable, followed by another story in which the disciples pick corn to eat on the Sabbath, and Jesus is questioned about his disciples' actions. One more miracle – curing a man with a withered hand, again on the Sabbath – and the religious leaders have had enough. The Pharisees and the Herodians begin their plot to destroy Jesus life.

Mark records the stories in quick succession. There are lots of action verses, moving quickly from one encounter to another.

These stories are good news – at least for the people. This good news turns out to be dangerous good news for Jesus.

#### GOSPEL STORY

Today's story is quite familiar. I first heard it as a child – and many times since. We heard about how the house in Capernaum where Jesus is staying, gets filled up with eager students – no social distancing expectations there. He spends the day teaching, not healing. He is talking about long held, 'sacred' understandings that can benefit from some fresh air. The house is packed full. And true to human practice everywhere and for all time (it seems), people stopped to listen right in the middle of the doorway.

And along come the heroes of the day. Four friends carrying a fifth friend – a person paralyzed, lying on a stretcher. And you're right, there is no way for them to get into the house. No way to get near the great teacher. No way to present their concerns to Jesus. That is, of course, until they engage their creative thinking.

Carefully, they navigate the steps on the side of the house, which leads to the flat rooftop. It seems easy enough to make a hole in the roof. Without any words of introduction or proof of citizenship or need, the four lower the stretcher where

their friend lies - motionless. Right down in front of Jesus. There are no explanations, no requests, no words spoken.

Marcus Crowe and Arthur Crowe will read a script adapted from an Iona Community script Present on Earth. Perhaps this is what the man was thinking. ...

VIDEO

### **PARALYZED MAN**

When some people  
have been lying in bed for eight hours,  
they get restless

They want to get up.

They feel guilty about enjoying their rest.

When most people have been ill  
or had an operation,  
they can't wait to get up.  
It's a sign they're on the mend.  
They want to show what they can do.

But when you've been lying in bed  
for ten years,  
when you've been paralyzed  
from the neck down,  
when you've been fed and bathed  
by your mother and father,  
as if you were a baby...

When you've been lying in bed  
for ten years,  
you'd think you'd be desperate to get up.

Don't believe it.

you're scared stiff.

Listen, I didn't ask to be cured.

I was not the one  
who asked for a stretcher party  
or organized putting a hole in my neighbour's roof  
or gave directions for lowering me into a crowded room,  
like a coffin being laid in a grave.

It was my friends who did it.

## **JESUS**

*Stand up,  
lift up your bed ...  
and go home.*

## **PARALYZED MAN**

So what do I say ...

about me ...  
about Him?

And how do I learn to do all the things  
that other folks have always done for me?

And how do you cope with the outside world  
if you've only seen it through a window,  
from your bed,  
for the last ten years.

When you change a cripple into a jogger,  
it's more than his legs you change ...  
it's everything. It's my whole life!

[adapted from Present on Earth – Iona Community, 184]

A new life. An altered life. This is what Jesus gives.

When Jesus enters our lives – it’s our whole life. Not just our spirits with a one-way ticket to heaven. Not just our bodies which can walk again. Not just our thoughts which see life more clearly. But all of us.

And it’s pretty clear that Jesus would not have had the chance to heal the man if it were not for the four friends who – ‘jumped the queue’. Regardless of what we might think of queue jumpers and the bold action taken in breaking open someone’s roof, Jesus admires the faith of these men whose actions lead to divine healing.

This is where the old story becomes the new story! Jesus looks into the eyes of the silent man and says, “My son, your past is done with, your sins are forgiven.”

Jesus sure knows how to make a point! And that point is not that sin leads to paralysis. He is not saying that our bad choices result in physical illness. In fact, in John 9 he makes it perfectly clear that blindness (here understand illness) of the man is not the result of either his or his parents’ sinful actions. When you look at the conversation as it unfolds you can see that Mark’s intention here is not to debate sin and sickness, but rather to give the readers a description who this man Jesus really is.

In response to the murmuring of the scribes - the keepers of the law and therefore the gatekeepers, they think, of God’s power, Jesus asks “Which of these is easier, to say to the paralytic your sins are forgiven or to say get up, pick up your stretcher, and walk?”

- You see, the old story is that only God can forgive sin. How can Jesus know that God has forgiven this man? How can Jesus witness forgiveness without any public confession on the part of the newly healed sinner? Herein lies the challenge from the scribes. What makes Jesus think that he knows the mind of God? Only God can know God’s mind. Jesus is claiming to be God and that’s blasphemy!!

This new story is not going so well. And Jesus just makes it worse when he calls himself the Son of Man! These scribes know only too well that “Son of Man” is a reference from their Hebrew scriptures (book of Daniel). This refers to a divine being in the likeness of a human being – literally the son of man – who will come

to them. This person will be able to forgive sin. As far as the scribes are concerned – this upstart is claiming divine authority – and this is just wrong!

Then as if to prove that he (the son of man) has authority on earth to forgive sin, Jesus tells the formerly paralyzed man on the stretcher, “get up, pick up your stretcher and walk! Go home!”

To the horror of those scribes and to the joy of all the others, the old world folds up and a new one is born: the man stands up from his stretcher and walks into the light of a totally new day!!

- A new story indeed! Hope in the midst of catastrophe. Invitation in the midst of opposition. Jesus appears to have the same authority and power as God. And what’s more is that humans are to participate as necessary partners in the fulfillment of God’s work on earth. Both are essential.
- **Consider our world’s currently prevailing story –this is our old story. We are told that we live in a material, random universe. The freedoms and privileges of the individual are of greatest importance. We are primarily physical objects that need material things to be fulfilled. Individualism and Consumerism are the two primary gods.**
- **This story leads to a permanent state of greed and competition. Violence, inequality, war, the environment, and almost any aspect of society we can think of are rooted in this old story. What we are witnessing in our world these past months – the riots in Washington, the Snowbirds flying to Florida to jump the queue to get their COVID vaccines first, the severe and unpredictable weather patterns, critique over the roll out of the vaccine – are part of the old story.**
- **But Mark is telling us a new story. This story tells us that we are body, *mind*, and *spirit*. *The new story says that life is not random, and we are not helpless to change it. It tells us that we are to love our neighbours as we love ourselves.***

This story is a story of hope. This new story contains the idea of holding faith for another, just as the four friends were praised by Jesus for their faith on behalf of their friend.

In our Sing the Journey songbooks, number 135, there is a statement of faith titled Hispanic Creed. After naming what we believe about God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, and the church we are prompted to say

“and because we believe, we commit ourselves:

To believe for those who do not believe

To love for those who do not love

To dream for those who do not dream

until the day when hope becomes reality.”

How many times aren't we invited to hold faith for others?! When our children are quite small, we hold faith for them as we tell them bible stories, and teach them to say grace before a meal, and demonstrate what kindness and compassion look like. When our dear ones move into dementia and forget who they are and what they believe, we remind them of their life experiences and tell them that God has not forgotten them – God still loves them, and they love God too.

- In our prayer lives we lift up those who seem unable to lift themselves up before God. In confidence we speak to God who hears and heals and accompanies us through the valleys of darkness. As a church community, we are invited to continually hold each other and the world in prayer. We are called to live lives of faith for each other – to love the Lord our God and our neighbours too.

Thinking about how the stories we tell ourselves and each other shape who we are and how we act, I'd like to tell you a story. It comes from the book Plant a Seed of Peace compiled by Rebecca Sieling. This story comes from Emmenthal, Switzerland, 1700s.

Night was falling on his tiny Swiss village, and Preacher Peter went to bed as he always did. He carried his lantern to the bedroom, put on his nightclothes, and crawled into bed.

As Peter lay there, he thought about his life as a Mennonite preacher. It was not an easy life. Many times, he had been teased and bothered by others in the village who did not agree with what he preached.

Peter had just fallen asleep when a noise awakened him. It must be my imagination, he thought. He heard the noise again. The sounds were coming from outside. It sounded like someone was walking on the roof!

Peter got out of bed, lit a lantern, and went outside. Several men were on the roof. Busily working. They were taking the thatch off the roof! Peter was shocked, he prayed "God, please help me to do what is right. Give me the right words to say to these men."

Then Peter had an idea. He went back into the house and quickly woke his wife. And asked her to prepare a meal for the men on the roof.

Immediately Peter's wife understood the meaning and got up, stoked the fire, and began to cook for the men.

The old preacher went outside and called to the men, "You must be tired! Come in for a bite to eat."

Surprised, the men came down and slowly entered the house. They sat at the places set for them. They looked down at their plates, too embarrassed to look up at the preacher and his wife.

Peter prayed a simple prayer, "Thank you, God, for the meal you have provided. Thank you also for our guests. Bless them in Jesus' name. Amen."

Peter's wife served the food to the men. They could not eat. They just sat quietly.

After a while, they left the table and climbed back onto the roof and replaced the thatch to fix the holes they had made.

Our Father in Heaven

Hallowed be your name

Your kingdom come

On earth as it is in heaven..