

# Body and Soul Healing

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Mark 2:1-12

Sermons Series:  
In Christ Together  
for the World

*Archeology  
intrigues me,  
always has.*

I find history fascinating, always have. When I was young, there was a stone bridge over the two-lane road near my parent's home with the inscription, "Philip Smith, 1832." If only those old stone walls could talk. What would they tell me?

Archeology intrigues me, always has. Jesus centered his adult ministry in a town called Capernaum. This tiny fishing village no longer exists. It was mysteriously evacuated in the 7<sup>th</sup> century AD. This town has been excavated in various archeological digs in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. A first century synagogue has been unearthed there, as has a cluster of homes. One house stands out from all the rest. It is alleged to be the home of St. Peter. The Christian graffiti on the walls references Jesus as Christ, Lord and Most High God. Peter's name is also etched on those same walls. Fish hooks and weights used for fishing have also been discovered at the site. The large foyer in the home was used as a house church in the first four centuries after Christ.

The picture on the screen depicts the home's exterior. The rooms opened to a center

Courtyard, complete with a stone furnace and oven and a stair-case leading to the roof. The roof was constructed with wooden beams and thatch mixed with mud. When it became unbearably hot, the family would retreat to the roof for sleeping purposes.

The four men in our story carry their paralytic friend to see Jesus. But the crowds have already filled the house and spilled into the street. They could always resort to the proverbial, "make way, coming through" approach, but then, things could get ugly. So, they come up with an ingenious plan. They climb on the roof, dig through and lower their friend to Jesus.

Imagine the reaction of the people on the inside. Digging a hole in the roof would have been noisy, messy work. Dust must have hung in the air and they must have been showered with debris. I wonder what the owner thought about the hole in his roof? Sir, we can make you a good deal on a sunroof. Then there is this little matter of a paralytic lowered into the room. It seems almost comical if it wasn't so desperate.

Jesus doesn't say, Can't you see I'm talking here? Jesus

***Jesus handles interruptions well.***

handles interruptions well. He calls the man on the mat “son.” The only other people called sons were Jesus’ 12 apostles (10:24). “Son, your sins are forgiven” (2:5).

Come on, Jesus, we’ve got a cripple on a pallet and you’re talking forgiveness? This isn’t quite what we had in mind. We didn’t lower our friend through the roof so you could pronounce forgiveness over him. If forgiveness is what we’re after, we could carry him to the temple and pay a visit to the priest.

The teachers of the law are standing nearby. They mutter under their breaths, “Why does this fellow speak in this way? It is blasphemy! Who can forgive sins but God alone?” (2:8).

Jesus knows what they are thinking. He asks his critics, “Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven’ or ‘Stand up and take your mat and walk?’” (2:9).

Initially, I thought it would be easier to pronounce forgiveness over the man. But now I’m not so sure. Maybe it would be easier to heal the paralytic and be done with it. To pronounce forgiveness would incur the wrath of these religious teachers. It’s not Jesus’ capacity to heal people that is on trial here but his audacity to forgive people. It would be one thing for Jesus to forgive the paralytic if he had committed sins against Jesus himself, but it’s quite another if he would for-

give sins committed against someone else. C.S. Lewis writes, “We can all understand how a man forgives offenses against himself. You tread on my toe and I forgive you. You steal my money and I forgive you. But what should we make of the person, unrobed and untrodden on, who announces that he forgives you for treading on other people’s toes and stealing other people’s money? Asinine fatuity is the kindest description we should give of his conduct.”

Jesus says, “But so that you will know the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins, I say to you, stand up, take your mat and go home” (2:11). This is the first of many instances in Mark’s gospel where Jesus refers to himself by the cryptic title, “Son of Man.” It turns out to be Jesus’ preferred self-designation. Other Messianic titles like Son of God have so much political baggage attached to them. The term “Son of Man” originated in the ancient prophecy of Daniel: “I looked and there before me was one like a Son of Man, coming on the clouds of heaven...He was given authority, glory and sovereign power over all people; all people and nations of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed” (Daniel 7:13-14).

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At Jesus' command, the paralytic in our story gets up, picks up his mat and, in full view of everyone, walks home. The people marvel, "We have never seen anything like this." I should say so.

We're focusing for the next four months on Jesus' identity, mission and call in Mark's gospel. This passage clearly establishes Jesus' identity.

Jesus sees what no one else can see. In verse 5, he can see the faith of the four friends. In verse 8, he can see what the teachers of the law are thinking. He can see into people's hearts and minds with penetrating insight.

On the surface, this passage seems like a straightforward healing story. Yet, this simple healing story is wrapped around a forgiveness story. Our story begins and ends with the healing of a paralyzed man. But Jesus breaks it off in the middle to have it out with the teachers of the law. This sandwiching makes it clear that we cannot talk about physical healing apart from spiritual healing. Healing and forgiveness are inextricably linked.

Jesus can do what no one else can do. For starters, he can heal people. But Jesus knows that what is wrong with people doesn't always show up on x-rays. The more I am in ministry, the more convinced I am that people's greatest need is forgiveness. We need someone to heal our guilt and shame and

forgive our sins and shortcomings.

Reynolds Price was an English professor at Duke University and a critically-acclaimed novelist. He was successful in every way. One day he received the sobering diagnosis of an 8-inch tumor wrapped around his spine. No operation could fully remove it. Privately, his doctors conjectured he had 18 months to live. Price began months of sickening treatments and pain management strategies. He began to pray and read the Bible the way most people do when their backs are up against it. Although he taught in a Methodist college, he described himself as an outlaw Christian and a part-time Protestant. One morning as he lay in bed drifting in and out of sleep, he had something of vision or a dream of some kind. He pictured himself at the Sea of Galilee wading into the water with Jesus. Jesus took handfuls of water and poured them over his head and back until the water ran down over his surgical scar. Then Jesus said to him, "Your sins are forgiven," and returned to shore. Price followed along behind, thinking, It's not my sins I'm worried about. So he had the gall to ask Jesus, Am I also cured? Jesus turned around and said two words, "That too." Then Price followed him out of the water and found himself at home again.

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His spinal cancer led to his confinement in a wheelchair, yet for 23 years Reynolds Price has gone on living. If you ask him what he got out of that experience, he will tell you, in no uncertain terms, "I'm filled with gratitude." For Price to hear Jesus' pronouncement that his sins were forgiven brought deep healing to his life.

This is one Bible story where everyone is present. I suspect we're all in this story somewhere.

Maybe you resemble the paralytic and feel paralyzed right now, stuck and unable to move. Your access is limited by a limitation of some kind. You find yourself on the mat and down for the count.

We somehow imagine our deep need for physical health and well-being. Jesus has a different take on things. He recognizes our yearning for forgiveness; both to be forgiven by God and to appropriate this forgiveness to others. Otherwise, revenge will eat us alive.

Maybe you resemble the teachers of the law. They look upon an honest-to-God miracle in the face, and all they can think about is whether this guy has the right to forgive sins. A paralytic carries his own mat home, but they stand off to the side, cynical and sulking. This paralytic is not the only one paralyzed in the story. These religious leaders are paralyzed, afraid of the prospect that Jesus will undercut their jobs as

religious professionals.

They're anxious about giving up control. Now, we're talking, folks. The issue is control.

Maybe you're afraid of giving up control. You're fearful of what you will be asked to relinquish. Jesus might cut into your stock portfolio or alter your life in some drastic way.

Maybe you resemble these four friends. I'll admit it, I'm partial to these guys. I admire their faith, their perseverance, their moxie. So, the house is filled to overflowing. We'll dig through the roof to get to Jesus.

I've noticed something about Mark's gospel. One half of the time, people appeal to Jesus directly. The other half of the time, people bring people to Jesus.

Would that we would have this kind of determination to bring friends into the presence of Jesus! If we bring people to Jesus, he'll do the rest. Last Sunday, we read where Jesus called us to fish for people. In effect, he said, you catch them and I'll clean them. You catch people with the love of God and I'll heal them, body and soul together.