

## **Man through the Roof – It's not about walking**

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Today we are taking a brief break from the story of the Jewish patriarchs before spending the next three weeks exploring the life of Joseph.

Our passage today is, rightly, a favourite for Sunday school and children's groups. Partly due to the endless craft opportunities it provides, partly (as John has shown) because it is so visual, but mainly because it is such an amazing story. There are good guys (the man, his friends and of course Jesus), bad guys (the scribes and Pharisees), drama as the man is lowered through the roof, expectation as we wait to see what Jesus will do and disappointment as he 'only' forgives his sin, confrontation as Jesus faces down the bad guys. All this is followed, like the best stories, by a happy ending as the man walks out of the house carrying his mat.

This story then is justly famous and has many aspects to it. It shows how Jesus stood up to the religious authorities of the time, how he demonstrates the fact he is God through the encounter, and how he shows depth of humanity as he deals with the man. Today though we are going, in this service of healing, to concentrate on what the passage tells us about healing itself.

I want to pick up on three key themes from our passage today that speak specifically into a healing ministry: Sin, Physical healing and Community.

We start with sin, always a difficult thing to talk about, especially in the context of a healing service. Before we unpack it lets picture the scene again. The man's friends lower him through the roof, they have walked with their friend to find this healer, they then move heaven and (literally) earth as they dig through the roof to get him to Jesus' feet.

Imagine the scene...the anticipation...what will happen next, what will Jesus do? Jesus bends down, looks at the man and says 'Friend...your sins are forgiven'. With that Jesus turns around and carries on teaching. What? Is that it? What good has that done? The man came for healing and Jesus simply utters some platitudes, that can't be right, can it? It is the Pharisees and scribes who now step into the action to put us, watching the scene in 2017, back on the right track...to, ironically, talk sense in to us. It is them who see what a huge thing it is that Jesus has claimed to do. They are the ones that see that sin is such a huge

thing. Sin is such a problem that there is no way a human being could forgive it – they realise that only God could do that. They realise that Jesus is claiming to do something that, because it is so huge, only God could do. In effect, this man is claiming to be God

We hear Jesus words of forgiveness to the man and, seeing that he is still lying on his mat, are disappointed. In fact, the man has been freed from the one thing that corrupts and disables more than anything else. This man has been freed from his sin – without any condition. He has been given the greatest freedom any human could have. And yet I...we...us, look on and see a man who is still disabled. Why? Why don't we see a man set free? Because we don't see people the way that God sees them. We are too quick to look on our disabled, ill or otherwise suffering brothers and sisters in Christ and see them as a problem in need of a cure rather than primarily as a child of the living God. Called, just like us, to live a life that glorifies him. We are too quick to identify them by their affliction rather than by their parentage.

And sometimes, especially if we are sick or disabled or otherwise suffering we are quickest to do this with ourselves. When you picture yourself in your mind's eye what do you see? Because what God sees is a child – his child, rebellious yes, who messes up sometimes yes, but a child who he would go to the ends of the earth to find if they were lost and who, if they walk away from him and find their own way back, lifts up his tunic and runs to greet. If you are sat there this morning and are hurting because of a physical or mental illness or disability know this, God loves you as you are. He sees you as a whole person. Your disability or illness does not make you any less human, any less whole. Your identity should be found only in the fact that you are a son or daughter of the living God.

At this point in the encounter, we are faced with a curious scene. We have Pharisees and scribes looking on seething...questioning...plotting, a man who came for one thing and got something far more precious, and, Jesus stood in the midst of it all. And it is Jesus, sensing what his critics are thinking, who acts next:

'Which is easier: to say, "Your sins are forgiven," or to say, "Get up and walk"? But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.' So he said to the paralysed man, 'I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.'

And the man does exactly that, he stands up, picks up the mattress that he was lowered down on and walks out. The man has been healed. Importantly the healing of this man is not a **sign** that his sins *have* been forgiven rather it is a **proof** that Jesus *can* forgive sins. There are plenty of times in the gospels when

Jesus heals without mentioning sin. Jesus does not make confession of sin a pre-requisite for healing and neither should we.

Jesus' healing of the man is not as the result of anything the man has done, he has been carried to Jesus, forgiven by him, and now also healed. Rather it is a sign for the Pharisees and scribes gathered around Jesus and for us today as we encounter this scene that Jesus is fully God. Not only does he have the power to heal but also, even more amazingly, to forgive sins. So this man rises from his mat and walks out of the house as a forgiven and fully fit human begin to begin a new life of freedom.

And the healing received by the man is available to us – to you and to me. God does heal in ways that we might call supernatural today, as a family, as a church, we have experienced it and we rejoice in it. But it is also true that, most of the time what we might call supernatural doesn't come. When it seems like our prayers are not answered. At this point I have to be completely honest – I don't know why it is that some are healed and some aren't, I don't know why it is that some suffer and some do not. But I do know this, whether you are healed or not is nothing to do with how much faith you have, or don't have. There are times when Jesus makes a link between faith and healing but there are also many times, like our scene here when the faith of the sick person is not even mentioned. Don't let anyone ever tell you that, if healing has not come for you, that it is because of a lack of faith on your part.

Finally this passage tells us that, in this situation, healing happens in community. It is the man's friends who bring him, on his mat, to Jesus. This man does not come alone, indeed this man cannot come alone. He is supported, literally, on his journey to healing by those who love him and who have, presumably, travelled with him on his journey of suffering.

Whilst there are times in the Gospels when healing happens because the sick person alone asks for it is also true that, usually, it is friends or relatives who bring a sick person to Jesus or who request that he come.

Our call as church is to carry those who are suffering. As a church we have a long tradition of walking with those who are sick, of being there for them. All you need to do is spend time looking at the dedications on the plaques, banners and benches around this place to get a sense of how as a church we have been there for our brothers and sisters in their darkest times.

It is because of the community's role in healing that it is right and proper that we have our times of prayer for healing during communion – that time when the church comes together to unite as the body of Christ round the table. As we all come broken to the table to be fed by our Lord so too can those who need healing come to his feet and ask for it. *We come as a broken community carrying those with particular burdens and laying them at Jesus feet.*

Today during communion you will have the opportunity to be prayed for and anointed with oil. To come with whatever burdens you carry – experienced people will be on hand to pray with you. My prayer for us, as we come to be anointed is this: that we will leave this place today freed from whatever binds us and go into the world more able to glorify Christ than when we came in. That may be because you leave your walking stick at the alter rail or it may be because God gives you the strength to glorify him in your suffering. Either way I pray that, this morning, you will meet him and know his healing.

To come and ask for healing is to make yourself vulnerable. You open yourself up to disappointment, to hurt. So as you come know this, as a community we resolve, like the paralysed man's friends, to carry you as much as we can. To, when you have lost all energy and resolve, place you at Jesus feet. So this morning come, come to the one who, more than anyone else has power to forgive and heal.