

Lake Cities Community Church
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On Your Mark

“What do you want? What do you need?”

Mark 2:1-12

There was once a little boy who wanted many things for Christmas. He wanted the newest video game system, and several games to go with it. He wanted a new basketball and the newest toy he had seen on TV. But... his mother knew... that what he *needed* was new socks and underwear. He needed a new pair of church pants and a new shirt. He was growing and the pants were getting short. That is what he needed, but not necessarily what he wanted. There is a difference between wants and needs. Parenting expert Haim Ginott said, “A child has real needs which should be satisfied but his wants are a bottomless pit.” What is true for kids is also true for adults. We have real needs, but our wants are a bottomless pit! What do you want as you approach 2009? What do you need?

The difference between wants and needs sets the stage for our text today. **Preview to Text:** 2,000 years ago there was a man who wanted something very badly. He wanted to be healed because he was paralyzed. We don't know the extent, or how he came to be paralyzed, but we know he could not walk. He was completely dependent on his family and friends. He wanted very badly to be healed, but I'm sure he wasn't holding his breath. Paralysis was back then as is it today - pretty much a permanent condition. Christopher Reeve, who played Superman in the movies, fell from a horse in 1995 and was paralyzed. He dedicated his life to fighting for a cure: “The Christopher and Dana Reeve Foundation is dedicated to curing spinal cord injury.” But no cure is yet in sight – and Reeve died in 2004.

But then - either he or his friends – heard about a miracle worker named Jesus. From Nazareth (of all places!) He was now in Capernaum. He was healing all kinds of people – the blind, the demon possessed, lepers – and two words entered the man’s brain: “*What if?*” What if I could find him? What if I could talk with him? What - if - he - would - heal - me? And so with his four good friends carrying him – the five men go to try to find Jesus. This morning we are in Mark chapter 2, verses 1-12. Please turn there with me. We begin with verses 1-4.

The Paralytic (1-4)

Mark 2:1 When He had come back to Capernaum several days afterward, it was heard that He was at home. Mark 2:2 And many were gathered together, so that there was no longer room, not even near the door; and He was speaking the word to them. Mark 2:3 And they came, bringing to Him a paralytic, carried by four men. Mark 2:4 Being unable to get to Him because of the crowd, they removed the roof above Him; and when they had dug an opening, they let down the pallet on which the paralytic was lying.

If you have been in church any length of time you know this story – it is the stuff of flannel graphs and lends itself to craft-time in Sunday School. It is a great story – colorful and dramatic. The home is packed as Jesus is teaching the people. We don’t know for sure, but this is probably Peter’s house – a small peasant’s house – about 10 x 10 feet with one door and one window. The house is so full and the crowds have overflowed to the frontyard. So when the four friends come with the paralytic man, it is not even possible to get to the front door – much less to get to Jesus. The crowds are a barrier to them coming to Jesus. At this point, if I were there - I would suggest waiting for the meeting to end, or returning the next day. But they are not deterred. Seeing the door is blocked, they think and act way outside the box. Here is my paraphrase of the plan – one of the men says: “Hey, why don’t we go up the side stairs of this stranger’s house, dig a large hole in their mud and thatch covered roof, and lower

our friend into the room, and if we dig in the right spot, he will come down right in front of Jesus. What do you think?" It is a crazy, desperate plan bordering on the edge of trespassing and property damage – and they all agree to it. Why? Because they believed that the man only a few yards from them had the power to heal their friend. If you have a cure within reach – you don't come back the next day. This was their opportunity. So they climb and dig the hole – falling dirt and grass stop the meeting and everyone looks up. The friends lower the man to the feet of Jesus and wonder what will happen next. Look now at Jesus' response.

Jesus' Response (5)

And Verse five begins, "And Jesus, seeing their faith." Jesus takes everything in and sees their faith. Note that "their" is in the plural. And commentators debate who Mark is talking about. Is it the faith of the four friends – bringing their faithless friend to Christ? Maybe, but the text is not clear on that. I take it that it is the collective faith of the five – the four friends who carry the man, and his willing faith also that submits to the crazy plan. And Jesus seeing their faith said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven." Note that He does not say, "You are healed." He does not say, "Take up your bed and walk." The man wants healing, but Jesus know that he needs forgiveness. And this takes the story in a whole different direction.

By pronouncing the man's sins are forgiven, Jesus is in essence saying – this man here is a sinner – an evildoer. Wow – it was embarrassing enough being lowered as everyone watched – but now – we have to talk about sin? Even more uncomfortable, in this statement, Jesus raises a connection between sin and a paralyzed man and we wonder; Did the sin cause the paralysis? Is the paralysis a punishment or natural consequence of something the man did? I'm sure that is what everyone is thinking.

Scribes (6-7)

And there is another radical issue that comes up. Look at very six, (6-7) “But some of the Scribes were sitting there. Scribes were in the room. Scribes were religious lawyers. They devoted themselves to study, interpretation and teaching of the law. They were more powerful than the priests— it was a greater crime to offend them than it was to break the law. “(they were sitting there) and reasoning in their hearts, “Why does this man speak that way? He is blaspheming; who can forgive sins by God alone?” They quickly make the connection between Jesus and God because in the Old Testament is quite clear that only God can forgive sins – Is. 43:25 “I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more. Mic. 7:18 Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? And to claim to be God when you are not - is blasphemy: What is the central question in the gospel of Mark? It is, “Who is Jesus.” Jesus here says fairly clearly, “I am God – because I forgive sin on my own authority.” I imagine that there are some here would have struggled with the deity of Jesus Christ – and rightly so. Often the issue of Jesus being God is a little bit hidden in Scripture. This is one clear example that Jesus claims to be God – it is the charge that would ultimately bring him to the cross.

Jesus’ Response to Scribes (8-11)

So Jesus turns to the Scribes and says, (8) “Why are you reasoning about these things in your hearts? Don’t miss the two miracles. Jesus knew the unspoken sins of the paralytic supernaturally - and now he knows the unspoken thoughts of the Scribes. God is omniscient – He knows all things. That must have freaked them out a little bit! Jesus asks: “Which is easier to say to the paralytic, “your sins are forgiven” or to say, “Get up pick up your pallet and walk?” Well, on one hand it is easier to say – your sins are forgiven – no verification needed. But to say – pick up your pallet and walk – is easily

proved. But, the point is that both are impossible for men, but equally easy for God. “But so that you will know that the Song of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins – He said to the paralytic, ‘pick up your pallet and go home.’” There is a new Sherriff being in town – Here he is boldly challenging the establishment and backing up his claims:

Man is healed (12)

Verse 12, “And he got up and immediately picked up the pallet and went out in the sight of everyone, so that they were all amazed and were glorifying God saying, “We have never seen anything like this.” One thing I love about Christianity is that it is such a public faith. No secret meetings behind closed doors. One characteristic of all cults is that there are many secrets. But with Christianity - nothing is in shadows - always in public – with people watching – in plain view – the man is healed and the people give glory to God.

Application

Now, let’s consider a few lessons and points of application.

- 1) **Faith must be put into action.** The one thing commended in this story is the faith of the four friends and the paralytic man. In this example, their faith was edgy and risky. Some of you here may need to take risky steps of faith this year –edgy and radical behaviors that might not feel comfortable. The great missionary Hudson Taylor said, “Unless there is an element of risk in your exploits for God, you will not need faith.” It may be that like the four friends – your faith will need to carry someone else this year – and bring them to Jesus. And, of course, there is nothing so risky as pouring yourself into the ministry of a local church. You risk being hurt, you risk disappointment, many people have given up on church for that reason. *In regard to*

faith, you may want to be safe in 2009 – but you may need to expose yourself to risk for the sake of the Kingdom.

2) **Sin is the cause, directly or indirectly, of all suffering in this world.** This passage reminds us of the reality of suffering - that we live in a broken world. Sometimes sin leads directly to suffering, and sometimes we suffer merely because we live in a fallen world. 99% of the time it is impossible to tell which it is – so we must be very careful in drawing any conclusions that somebody’s particular trial is because of their sin. Woody Allen, however, who is no Christian, said in his observation of the world, “To live is to suffer.” J.I. Packer give us the theology behind that writing: "God leaves us in a world of sin to be tried, tested, belabored by troubles that threaten to crush us--in order that we may glorify him by our patience under suffering, and in order that he may display the riches of his grace and call forth new praises from us as he constantly upholds and delivers us." The end, like in our story, is praise and glory to God. Only God can redeem something bad for something good – and in that we have our hope.

3) **To be forgiven is man’s greatest need.** This story started out as a healing story, but Jesus made the subject of the story forgiveness. We began by talking about want and needs, and our greatest need is to be forgiven. Pastor Horace Bushnell once said, “Forgiveness is man’s deepest need and highest achievement.” Ultimately, *whether we are forgiven by God will be all that matters.* Not far from New York City is a cemetery where there is a grave which has inscribed upon its headstone just one word, “forgiven.” There is no name, no date of birth or death, no artists embellishment, no epitaph – just one word – the most important word that can ever be said of any person – “Forgiven.” Are you a forgiven person, as you enter into 2009? Jesus offers forgiveness freely to those who trust in Him. The only requirement is faith. The comedy show “My Name is Earl” if you have ever seen it has a Buddhist worldview – called Karma. Earl, who has done so much wrong now seeks to forgiveness through making up for

what he has done – if his good deeds can in the end balance his bad deeds – well then the show will be over! But, that is not a Christian worldview – God says – you can never make up for the evil you have done – and you don't have to. Jesus pays the price for the bad you did – and then takes his perfect life and transfers it to your account. The most amazing thing about this story is how freely forgiveness is given to the paralytic – there are no assignments. Forgiveness is given freely by Jesus to those who trust Him. And once we have been forgiven by God – we can forgive others – not because they have “made it up to us”, but because that is what Christians do [Eph. 4:32](#) **Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.** As you and I enter the New Year - let's be mindful of the power of forgiveness. Do you need to be forgiven? Are you carrying guilt and regret like a 200 lbs backpack? Do you need to forgive someone else?

Conclusion:

The little boy that wanted the video game and basketball and car for Christmas – that boy was me – many years ago; and my practical Mom knew I really needed (clothes) - and you kids who received clothes this year – make sure to thank you mom for them – they are important. But you know what? Because my Mom and Dad loved me so much – they didn't just cover my needs – they also, often gave me (some of) what I wanted. They didn't have Wii back then – the coolest thing was the “Atari” video game system. I got my new basketball and an Evil Keneivel stunt car that would break apart – very cool.

We conclude with this thought – so often our good God meets our needs and our wants. “Your sins are forgiven,” he told the paralytic, followed by “Take up your mat and walk.” He wanted healing, he needed forgiveness. He got both. That is how much God loves you and I.