

February 15, 2009

Isaiah 43:18-21; Mark 2:1-12

### “It Takes Faith”

It was a hot, dry day and there was very little breeze blowing outside. Within the confines of that one room home, there were so many people jammed together that it was hard to breathe. The one door and the only window were open, but a huge crowd had gathered and literally filled the street there in Capernaum, thereby blocking any air that might have tried to filter into the home.

I was one of the lucky ones to be inside the house. Huddled between two tall men, not far from the Teacher, I tried to remain inconspicuous. But no one paid me any attention. Everyone was concentrating on Him, drinking in every word He was saying. None of us had ever heard anyone teach as He did, not even the scribes from Jerusalem taught like this!

He made God seem so real, so close, so interested in us. The Teacher was telling us about God’s new kingdom and He made it seem as though we were being invited into the most splendid banquet we could possibly imagine. I began to picture the beautiful palace, the sumptuous food, all the people in their finest robes, and my heart yearned to be part of such a wonderful place.

My daydreaming was interrupted when something fell on my head. I looked up and, to my astonishment, saw that part of the roof had caved in. Soon more of the mud and branches came tumbling down and everyone began gazing upward. The Teacher stopped talking and He, too, watched with interest as a small hole began to appear in the roof.

It wasn’t long before we could see hands digging away at the roof until the hole became fairly large. Then the most incredible thing happened. A man began to be lowered through the hole down into the house. The people on the roof struggled to complete their task gently, and we tried to maneuver ourselves around in the packed house to make room for the newcomer.

We recognized the man who was being lowered into our midst. It was Jacob, who had been paralyzed for as long as I could remember. He didn’t say anything at all; in fact no one said a word. We were all holding our

breath, waiting to see what would happen next. We were totally unprepared for what occurred.

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The Teacher looked down at Jacob and said, My child, your sins are forgiven.” We all sucked in so much air at once that I was afraid 2we had inhaled all the air in the world! “Your sins are forgiven!” Only God can forgive sins. Does this Teacher think He is God?

Evidently I was not the only one to be astounded at the Teacher’s words. He must have sensed our shock, even some people’s anger and hostility, because He asked the scribes which was easier: to forgive sins or to heal a paralytic. Then He told the scribes that in order to prove that He had the authority to forgive sins, He would heal Jacob.

So the Teacher ordered him to get up, pick up his bed and go home. And Jacob did just that! A man who was never able to move just stood up, picked up his mat and walked out the door. You’ve never seen a path created in a crowd so quickly! It was like Moses parting the Red Sea!

Some of us fell on our knees, others lifted their hands toward heaven, still others had tears streaming down their faces; but all of us began praising God. You must have been able to hear the songs and shouts for miles. Never before had we seen anyone anywhere – forgive sin. What a great day!

(PAUSE)

Were you expecting our storyteller to say that the people had never before seen a paralyzed man walk? That was not the miracle. The healing of the paralytic was only the sign of authenticity for the real miracle. Jesus of Nazareth came to forgive sins. Not just vague, unidentified sins, but your sins and mine.

That incredibly good news often gets lost in today’s world. Some people tell us that forgiveness is unnecessary. As long as it feels good, do it. They say, “We don’t need a man bleeding on a cross to forgive us.

But for others, sin and the resultant guilt are so overwhelming that we find it hard to believe that Jesus can forgive us. Sin is destructive, crippling us mentally, emotionally and sometimes physically. And it stands in the way

of an intimate, loving relationship with our heavenly Father.

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This is where the word from Isaiah comes into the picture. “God is doing a new thing.” Wake up! Forget about what has happened in the past. Open your eyes! See what God is doing!

The new thing God is doing is initiating forgiveness into the equation of the relationship between us and our Creator. It is God’s giving and our receiving forgiveness that then is manifested in our giving and receiving forgiveness with one another.

Fred Craddock writes: “Perhaps no word has gathered to itself so many beautiful images of the new: Forgiveness is dawn, birth, snowfall, resurrection, springtime, a new year, release, jubilee, pardon, a new creation, and countless other analogies. But in all this beauty and promise, the experience itself remains surprisingly rare. Why?

“Is it because it seems too good to be true? Is it because forgiving seems too easy, too permissive, too condoning? Or is it rather because forgiveness is meaningless in a society that sees nothing to forgive or to be forgiven?”

[Saunders and Craddock, **Proclamation 2**]

It takes faith to believe that we are sinners, that we have broken the most incredible relationship imaginable. It takes faith to repent of our sin. It takes faith to accept the fact that because of the atoning death of Jesus Christ on the cross the price for our sin has been paid – once and for all. It takes faith to believe that we, as individuals, are indeed forgiven.

Jesus’ words to the paralyzed man are crucial. He addressed the man in a tender, personal manner: “My child” or “My son.” And then, as the Greek text shows, Jesus emphasizes the next word: “Your sins are forgiven.” It’s not just that Jesus is forgiving sins, but that He is forgiving **my** sins and **your** sins. It is very direct and very personal.

It takes faith to believe that you are receiving this priceless, costly gift of forgiving love. Do you have the faith to believe that you are a hopeless sinner, that you can never repair the damage you have done to your

relationship with God, but that in Jesus Christ you are forgiven and the relationship has been healed?

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Whether you are burdened with guilt or filled with apathy, you are on the path of destruction. It takes an act of faith to break out of our prisons and go home – home to the God who created us and loves us. What Jesus is really saying to the paralytic is, “Child, God is not angry with you. Come home, and don’t be afraid.” [Barclay]

God certainly is doing a new thing! The blind see, the deaf hear, the lame walk, the sinner is forgiven. God is doing a new thing! An alcoholic is transformed into a responsible adult. An addict becomes clean. An ordinary woman is called by God to lead her congregation into discovering the power of prayer.

A common man, touched by God, leads his congregation into a ministry of healing and hope. A teacher is given the priceless opportunity to witness to Jesus with his or her students. A retiree comforts the dying in a hospital or nursing home. An ill person is cheered by a handmade card from a child.

Ordinary people, youth and adults who have no previous training, find themselves building or repairing houses in the name of Jesus Christ. And the result is that their hearts are as transformed as are the homes they have created. God is doing a new thing with us! Do you not see it?

I find it a constant source of joy that God wants to use me for some purpose in His kingdom. I am amazed that He does so. I am no one special – just an ordinary person who believes with all my heart that Jesus forgives me and calls me to be part of the kingdom He came to initiate. It is the most freeing thing in the world to know that God is not angry with me, but that God loves me.

Jesus is saying to each one of us, “Child, God is not angry with you. Come home, and don’t be afraid.” Do you believe this? It takes faith. You can trust Jesus who died for you. He is looking you right in your eyes, asking you to put your faith in Him, and come home.

Let us pray. “My faith looks up to Thee, Thou Lamb of Calvary, Savior  
divine. Now hear me while I pray; take all my guilt away. O let me from  
this day, be wholly Thine. Amen.

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