

“Breaking Through the Roof”

A Sermon by, Dr. Laird J. Stuart

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Daniel 7:13-14; Mark 2:1-12

How eager are you to bring someone to Christ? How **eager** are **you** to bring someone to **Christ**?

I realize that may not be the foremost question in your life right now. It may sound rather abrupt. How eager are you to bring someone to Christ? Okay, to be fair, how eager am I?

This is, however, a question that leaps up out of this passage from Mark's Gospel. Mark's Gospel is rather lean. He gets right to the action in the life of Christ. He does not have the long birth narratives or the soaring prologue of John's Gospel. Mark gets right to it. By the start of the second chapter we already know that Jesus has been in his active ministry. People are marveling at the authority of his words, at the compelling truthfulness and power of them. People have also seen many healings.

On this occasion, Jesus has returned to his home in Capernaum. People learned he was at home. A crowd of them came to his house, going into the house, filling the doorway and spilling out around the house.

There were some people, somewhere, we are not told where, who decide to bring a man they know who is paralyzed to Jesus. Four of them agree to carry him on his bed or mat. They bring him to the house. But they cannot get in. No one gets up and says, “Oh, please, go ahead.” No one offers to go into the house to get Jesus and ask him to come out to this man and the people who have brought him. There is about as much civility here as there is on a MUNI bus. No one wants to give up his or her seat. So the men climb up on the house and break through the roof. It was a flat roof. Some of those homes would have had a tile roof, but not this home. As they are breaking through, no one calls out to them to stop. They break through and lower the man down to Jesus. Talk about being eager to bring someone to Christ!

II

This is, of course, a story that is primarily not about the man who is brought to Jesus but it is a story about Jesus and about what he can do with a human life. Maybe there are reminders in this story about what Christ has done in your life.

For instance, Jesus heals this man. He heals the paralytic. This is not an isolated incident. It happens over and over again in the records of the life of Jesus. He heals people. He obviously cares for them, especially the ones, but not only the ones, pushed to the margins of society.

This is a reason to bring someone to Jesus. He loves and cares for us.

In a hospital room, a family gathers around a loved one. They come in one's and two's and three's sharing the vigil beside him. He cannot communicate with them. They are worried about his condition and his recovery. They are worried about their own lives now. But now and then there is prayer. Now and then the name of this congregation is invoked for them and they are reminded of this communities prayers. They have their own faith. Somehow the combination of the prayers, the invoking of the name of this congregation, and their faith brings them a comfort and strength, from God through Christ they would not otherwise have had. That is a healing.

A family stands beside the grave of someone they love. Because of their Christian faith, they believe and trust that they can commend this loved one to God's everlasting care. It is a deep comfort. If you are new to Christian faith, or still experimenting with it, let me tell you something about how this faith works if you nurture it in your life during your life. You start out hearing about Jesus. You examine and wonder about him. Somewhere along the line, maybe without even noticing it, you come to believe in and to trust Jesus. But it does not stop there. The longer you

believe in Jesus the more you will eventually come to love Jesus for the sheer wonder of this life. Then when you are beside some grave of someone you love, you can entrust someone you love to someone you love. That is a healing.

There are people wondering now whether or not they can count on that income that allows them to pay their mortgage and the private school tuitions of their children. Such wondering can lead to deep anxiety. It is not just about a house, it is about the future of your children. Jesus Christ does not print money. But this Jesus can come to your worry and hold your life in a way that steadies you and enables you to be stronger for whatever you face.

Jesus heals and still heals. This is a reason to bring people to Christ.

Another reason for bringing someone to Christ that is suggested in this story is gratitude to Christ for the community Christ created.

At the very beginning of his ministry, Jesus gathered a community of disciples around him. He knew he would need them and they would need him for his work. After his death and resurrection, he went back to them, gathered them together, and told them God would send the Holy Spirit to them to keep them strong together in the new community of the Church.

Being brought to Christ invariably means also being brought into a community, a community of faith.

I know and you know there are people who get hurt by the Church. From time to time we need to remind ourselves of the observation by Gandhi that Christians are sometimes the reason people do not believe in Christ. There are also people who say they do not need the Church to be Christian. I wonder what kind of Christianity they have in mind. I cannot imagine being Christian apart of a community of faith. If we really do not need the Christian Church to be Christian, why did Paul work so hard to form Christian communities?

For all our limitations and sins, we are the communities of faith that help each other in faith. More often than not, we are like that community that carried the man to Jesus. More often than not

we serve the faith. More often than not we worship rightly. More often than not we learn from scripture. More often than not we serve both the Church and Kingdom of God out beyond it.

There is yet one other reason, suggested in this passage. **It is that the life of Jesus Christ does display for us the life of God.**

In the story, Jesus makes a point of referring to himself as the “Son of Man”. This was one of the titles the people of Judaism used to identify the Savior and Messiah for whom they were waiting. There were passage in their scriptures, like the passage from Daniel, that told them at some time a new life would come to them, like a person, but sacred and divine. They used that passage and others to keep their hopes alive for this new gift to them from God. Here is Jesus saying he is that one.

I remember someone saying that during the life of Jesus, there might have been as many of 50, 60, even 70 people going around, with their disciples, saying they were the Messiah. It must have been something like primary season in this country. Here is Jesus saying, he is the one.

What this means is that Jesus is God’s Son. As God’s Son, one of the things he does for us is to give us a standard for knowing God. God does us such a great favor by coming to us in human form. God is an invisible spirit. Yet God chooses to come to us in our own shape; so that we no longer have to use the interpretations of prophets and priests. We can see directly in human form who God is. The words of Jesus tell us what God is saying. The actions of Jesus show us how God acts and wants us to act.

We do not believe that revelation from God is restricted to Jesus. God, being sovereign, can reveal God’s self in other ways: through nature and through other religions. But we do believe Jesus Christ is the standard for measuring all the competing truth claims out there about God.

Finally, the story then points to something else. **We might want to bring people to Christ for his gift of forgiveness.**

The first thing Jesus does is forgive this paralytic. Before he heals the paralysis, he forgives the man. We are finite and limited creatures. We

cannot possibly live always the way God wants us to live. God knows this. Instead of holding it against us, instead of trying all over with another kind of creature, God is willing to forgive us.

It is God's forgiveness that we often need. This is what the scribes pick up on in this story. Their religion has rightly taught them that only God can forgive our sins against God. They are right. When I offend my wife, it does not do any good to go up to some stranger on the street and ask to be forgiven for something I have done to my wife. I need to go to her. I need to name the sin. I need to ask for her forgiveness. It is the same with us and God. We need God's forgiveness for our neglect of God. We need to ask God's forgiveness for our neglect of each other. When we ask, we are forgiven. It is all wiped away. We are like that Prodigal Son, welcomed home.

III

As I was cleaning up my desk from Advent, Christmas and Epiphany, I came across an article I had read early in Advent. It was reporting that in some communities where there were outdoor manger scenes, people were stealing some of the figures. They were stealing the shepherds, the wise men, the animals, Mary, Joseph and even Jesus. So some communities were putting GPS devices in the figures so they could track down the thieves. I sometimes wonder who needs the comics when there is plenty of humor in the rest of the news.

Our message to people is that you do not have to steal Jesus. We are here to share him.