



Sermons from  
First Presbyterian Church

**“Devoted to Healing”**

The Rev. Evans L McGowan

July 22, 2012

Sixteenth Sunday In Ordinary Time

Joshua 6:15-21

Mark 2:1-12

Let us pray. Jesus, as we descend into the depths of this story to meet you, may we remember you are the one who revives the living and the dead. Be gracious to us as we call on your name, seeking your forgiveness, healing and wholeness, in the name of love, Amen.

The cramps weren't bad at first. Just a shooting pain up my side now and then, but nothing a healthy freshman in college couldn't handle. After all, I was playing a lot of basketball and other sports, and lived by the motto, "no pain, no gain." But cramps became stitches, increasing in frequency until my abs were on fire, like I had done a thousand sit-ups. My friends were going to dinner, and I waved them on, saying I didn't feel so good and needed to lie down. I awoke in a dazed stupor and a cold sweat. The pain had all localized in my lower right abdomen, and I realized it wasn't going away. I was paralyzed by the pain, frozen in fear by what was happening to me.

Having appendicitis is about the closest I've ever come to feeling paralyzed. It's a frightening experience, not being able to control your own body and feeling very vulnerable to anything and everything around you. I needed help getting to the hospital, just like the man in this story needed help to get to the healer. Four men actually dig through the roof of his dwelling, lowering him down right in front of Jesus. It's surprising that neither Jesus or anyone else is angry at them for doing so. "Hey, that's my roof you just dismantled!" But even more surprising is that Jesus, upon seeing the faith of the paralytic's *friends*, doesn't heal the obviously prone man, but instead forgives him his sins. Only THEN do people start to get angry.

You see, this is still early on in Jesus' ministry, and he was a celebrity. There are no complaints, as here is a man who went around healing people – what's there to

complain about? No one likes to be sick, and no one wants to be around sick people. It's a win-win. But forgiveness of sins, of wrongdoings and mistakes? Now wait a minute! That would be like going to some guru who tells you, "All your debt is paid – you owe no more taxes, no more car or house payments, no more student loans." The government, the banks and the lenders will cry foul! Who is this guru to forgive OUR debts? "Child, your sins are forgiven" – with these words Jesus starts a revolution, going from teacher to trouble-maker.

To not pay what you owe is to upset the status quo. Can you imagine a world where people take things and no one pays for anything? Where all you have to do is fall before some guru-guy, and all is forgiven? This is the outrage we hear from the scribes, and if we're honest with ourselves, we share the same outrage. You pay what you owe – that's written somewhere in our Constitution, right?

Yet Jesus has a response for us and the scribes. He retorts with questions of his own: "Why are you even asking these questions? And what is easier, to forgive sins or to heal this man? In other words, he's asking, "What's all the fuss about?" and "What's the difference?"

You see, much like the scribes, we think of sin as a debt to be paid, a mistake that must be rectified, a crime that must be punished. But here Jesus argues that sin is sin, whether it's in our bodies as physical ailment or in our minds affecting our decision-making. Sin is a sickness that must be expunged so the body, mind and soul can heal. This man is sick, clearly, and Jesus heals him, setting him free – from the paralysis of his body and the paralysis of sin.

Do you know what Jesus is talking about? Are there times or places in your life where you feel paralyzed, by sickness or sin?

My parents gave me two rules growing up: Let us know where you are and make sure there's an adult around. In 8<sup>th</sup> grade I stayed after school one day, but instead of working on a class project like I said I was, I decided to go home with a friend and have some fun. We ended up going over to his neighbor's house where she was home without her parents around. At this point, I wanted to be good and call home, but I

knew my mom wouldn't like where I was or who I was with. So I called home and told her I was at my friend's house working on the project (Lie #1). She said fine, but who was Mr. Matthey? Now about this time a little invention had just made it's way into our household, and you may remember it – it was called Caller ID. Nowadays we can't imagine not knowing who's calling us and from where, but back then they had these special boxes you could attach to your home phone to let you know who's calling. You even had to pay extra for it! My mom had picked up the ONE phone in the house that had it and had asked a very reasonable question: Where were you calling from?

And the lies just kept coming. Mr. Matthey is my friend's step-father, that's why he has a different last name. No, he can't come to the phone right now – he's in his office and doesn't want to be disturbed. The girl's voice? Oh, that's my friend's sister. And on and on and on it went. I was stuck in a rut of lying, and it became easier to keep the fib alive than for my pride to die. I was paralyzed in my predicament, unable to scramble my way out, devoted to my own destruction.

I'll never forget at the end of that day, standing in front of my mother seated across the room, continuing to lie to her, when she stopped me and said, "Son, I can no longer believe a word you say. When your father gets home, try telling him the truth."

The things devoted to destruction are many – cancer, viruses and the like – and yet we have a cancer in our souls, a virus on our tongues. Maybe someone sinned against us. Maybe we sinned against others, passing judgment and condemning them or even ourselves. For Jesus, there is no difference. Sin is sickness – that something inside of us needs to be exorcised; the chains must be broken, whoever put them on there. Whether we are paralyzed by pain or stuck in sin, Jesus desires to heal us, to set us free from the bondage of our sickness.

When in your life have you been set free? Where in your life today do you desire to be healed, to be set free from the bondage of sickness?

Watch out – transformation is a-comin'. The sick will be healed. Debts will be paid. Prisoners will be set free. The paralyzed will walk, even dance! Sinners will be forgiven, and rejoice!

Just remember one thing: The sick cannot heal themselves. They need friends to see their pain and carry them to the healer. And this action sews the seeds of healing. After all, Jesus heals the paralytic after seeing the faith not of the sick man, but of his four friends.

This is why we are here today. We are here to form the break the bonds of sin and forge the bonds of friendship, that we might take care of one another. If you are sick, may you find friends see the pain you are in, and come to your aid.

If you're not sick, may you have eyes to see and ears to hear, those who are in need of healing.

There is a time for justice, a time when debts are paid. But here, here there is sickness, and it must be healed by the generous spirit of Jesus.

Do you believe forgiveness and healing can be found HERE, on earth, as it is in heaven? Do we have compassion for sinners? For those who are sick? For ourselves?

May you experience the healing power of Christ, in your lives and the lives of others, and be amazed.

To God be the glory and the healing power, forever and ever. Amen.

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