

Baptism of the Lord/Narrative Lectionary Year 2
January 12, 2020
Psalm 103:6-14; Mark 2:1-12
Resolutions Sermon Series #2 (Theme: Exercise): “Walk”

Mark 2:1-12

2When he returned to Capernaum after some days, it was reported that he was at home. 2So many gathered around that there was no longer room for them, not even in front of the door; and he was speaking the word to them. 3Then some people came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them. 4And when they could not bring him to Jesus because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him; and after having dug through it, they let down the mat on which the paralytic lay. 5When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, “Son, your sins are forgiven.”

6Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts, 7“Why does this fellow speak in this way? It is blasphemy! Who can forgive sins but God alone?” 8At once Jesus perceived in his spirit that they were discussing these questions among themselves; and he said to them, “Why do you raise such questions in your hearts? 9Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Stand up and take your mat and walk’? 10But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins” —he said to the paralytic— 11“I say to you, stand up, take your mat and go to your home.” 12 “And he stood up and immediately took the mat and went out (walking) before them; so that they were all amazed and glorified God saying, ‘We have never seen anything like this!’”

Pastor: The Word of the Lord. *People: Thanks be to God.*

Today’s theme is about walking, and it is an activity that many Americans need to do more of. Walking is so good for us. One website for better health reports these benefits of walking: being able to carry your own weight, increased cardiovascular and pulmonary (heart and lung) fitness, reduced risk of heart disease and stroke, improved management of conditions such as hypertension (high blood pressure), high cholesterol, joint and muscular pain or stiffness, and diabetes, stronger bones and improved balance, increased muscle strength and endurance, and reduced body

fat. (Source: <https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/healthyliving/walking-for-good-health>).

Walking can be a spiritual activity where you notice God's creation, the wind upon your skin, sunrises and sunsets, the moon at night, birds flying over the sea or salt marsh, and you can meditate upon such gifts with each step, giving thanks in prayer. Walking is an activity we can do with our family and friends to cultivate relationships. We can walk and talk and forge better connections. I challenge us in 2020 to spend more time walking, noticing life that is all around us. It is good for the body and good for the soul.

Jesus spends a significant chunks of his life walking from one place to another, and today's story describes a time when he walks to Capernaum and meets in someone's home. So many people gather that they spill out into the yard. The word is out far and wide that Jesus is a teacher and a healer, and so it is no surprise that four people walk and carry a paralyzed man to Jesus so that he can heal him. To be paralyzed means that you cannot walk at all. This small detail is one of those important silences in the gospel. Why is the man paralyzed? Maybe he is born this way? Maybe he at one point in his life knew how to walk, but he got injured and so walking is an impossibility. The Gospel writer does not tell us about the paralysis but only that he is paralyzed. What do you think about this detail?

As I imagine it and fill in details the writer of Mark does not give us, I think the paralyzed man was at one point very active, and he does something sinful such as jump on a horse in a fit of anger to settle some score with another, and in so doing much like Christopher Reeves, he falls to the ground and injures his spine. His four closest friends are devastated by the trauma, and they will do anything they can to get him help.

These four are not going to allow a crowded yard and home deter them from the chance to help their friend, and so they literally dig through the roof to lower him into Jesus' presence. What would it be like to be Jesus watching all of this happen? He is obviously very impressed by the friend's effort, by their willingness to do whatever it takes to help their paralyzed pal, and by their sheer grit and determination and dare we say, their faith! Jesus does not need much convincing at all to help the paralyzed man. He sees what others do for him and declares, "Son, your sins are forgiven!"

Those five words are so poignant, don't you think? Son, daughter, child—Jesus makes a very personal connection with those who suffer. Whatever has caused you such pain and suffering, I forgive it. Notice the grace in this story: Jesus does not require that the paralyzed man pray the sinner's prayer or repent. He forgives him because of what others do for him, or we might conclude Jesus forgives because that is just the kind of Savior and Messiah he is?

Oftentimes we think, "If I am good enough, God will love me." No, here Jesus shows us, "God loves you. You are enough. Receive the gift. Be thankful."

It is very important for us to remember as we walk through Mark together that one of the key things the writer wants us to know about Jesus is that he has authority and power. Jesus calms inner and outer storms. Jesus heals the sick and can outsmart demons. Jesus is a vessel, a conduit for the Holy Spirit. The Messiah is not some puppet for those scribes in the temple to pull the strings of and control. No, he is free to unleash the Spirit of God's grace in the world in such ways that those who receive it celebrate, and those who question it are humbled into silence.

Some hear Jesus forgive sins, and they grumble about it. Tom Wright says, "Not surprisingly those around feel uneasy. Only the priests could declare forgiveness, speaking in the name of God. If that's what the man needs, his friends should take him to the temple in Jerusalem, not to a wandering preacher...this story is a tiny version of the whole gospel: Jesus teaching and healing, Jesus condemned for blasphemy, Jesus vindicated. The paralyzed man's healing points forward to the new life that Jesus himself will have in the resurrection, and will share with everyone who wants it" (*Mark for Everyone*, WJK Press, Louisville, KY (2004) p.17).

Remember how Jesus reacts to those who grumble? He challenges them, and all of us as the readers, to consider what is more difficult: simply to say that a paralyzed person's sins are forgiven or to enable that person to walk again?

The obvious answer for this Jesus test is "B," right? It is much more difficult, and let's be honest, impossible for us to heal a paralytic! Not for Jesus. He tells the paralyzed man he is healed, and the man gets up, grabs the mat he was lying on, and he walks! This amazes everyone, even the doubters, and that is how the scene ends.

Here's what I wonder. How does the man walk home? We are left to imagine it. What picture do you have in your mind? Does the formerly paralyzed man drag

his feet slowly, shuffling and stumbling from side to side? Does he leap and skip when he walks home because he is so happy to be able to walk again or for the first time? Does he walk quietly and wipe tears from his eyes with each step in absolute amazement or does he shout with each step that he's been healed by Jesus?

However you and I imagine the man walking, I think he walks with gratitude. He is grateful to Jesus for the love he shows to him. Are you and I grateful for all the love God shows to us? My prayer today for us, especially as we begin our walk slowly into 2020 and as we ordain and install another class of officers to serve at this church, is that we will practice walking with gratitude.

Author, professor, and pastor, Rev. Dr. Bruce Epperly (from Lancaster Seminary) describes walking with gratitude in this way: "Whether your pace is slow or aerobic in cadence, take some time simply to look around you as you walk. Experience the wonder of movement, of the senses, of the ambient earth. Bathe your senses in the form and color of plants and trees, the harmony of human and nonhuman sound, the extravagance of human creativity (if you are walking in the city). Ponder life's gifts to you. As you recount each one, you may choose to affirm your gratitude to God and others, "I thank you for_____."

Let words of thanks pour forth from your heart and mind. What you will discover, whether your walk is just around the block or over a mountain, is that it is virtually impossible to run out of things for which to be thankful in your relationships, in the beauty of nature, and in your own giftedness and uniqueness" (Source: <https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/practices/practices/view/23735>).

When we walk with gratitude, we remember that God is always walking with us, always there to love, to guide, to comfort, and to heal. In her cleverly poetic way, author Annie Dillard says if we will walk with gratitude we will notice many gifts: "The world is fairly studded and strewn with pennies cast broadside by a generous hand. But- and this is the point- who gets excited by a mere penny? But if you cultivate a healthy poverty and simplicity, so that finding a penny will literally make your day, then, since the world is in fact planted in pennies, you have with your poverty bought a lifetime of days" (from *A Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*).

What does the Lord require of us, my friends? The prophet of Micah reminds us: "To do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with God."

To God be the glory. Amen.