

“Up On the Roof”

Mark 2:1-12

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Even though Little Eva sang it first, it was made popular by the Drifters in 1962. “Up on the Roof” was a breezy summertime song that told what many city dwellers did to escape the stresses of daily living by climbing to the roofs of their buildings and relaxing on the “tar beaches.”

When this ol world starts getting me down
And people are just too much for me to face,
I climb my way to the top of the stairs
And all my cares just drift right into space.
On the roof it's peaceful as can be
And there the world below can't bother me.

It was everything but peaceful on the roof that day in Capernaum when four men lowered their friend through a hole in the roof in order to see Jesus. They tried to get him through the front door, but there were too many people blocking their way. Instead of turning and going home, though, they climbed the stairs outside the house and tore open a section of the thatched roof, making it possible for them to lower their friend where Jesus was. You can't accuse these men of being timid or indifferent, that's for sure.

This miracle is one of ten that Mark records to reveal Jesus' compassion and God's healing presence in this world. It also strongly affirms the importance of community and friendships. Let's look at it this morning.

After his first journey around Galilee, Jesus returned to Capernaum, the place he called home. When news spread of his arrival, crowds surrounded his home listening to him teach and looking for a miracle.

Four men approached the house with their lame friend but were unable to get to Jesus because the entrance was blocked. As I mentioned a moment ago, they refused to leave but went up on the roof and lowered him through a hole they tore in the thatched roof. Jesus was so overwhelmed by the compassion and faith of these men that he healed the paralytic.

You would think everyone would be ecstatic about what they had just witnessed, and most were. However, not everyone rejoiced and celebrated. The scribes appeared to be upset and accused Jesus of blasphemy. They focused their attention upon what Jesus said, not what he did, and were incensed that he would declare this man's sins forgiven. Only God could forgive sins, and anyone that declared otherwise was a blasphemer.

Jesus knew they were criticizing him and boldly responded to it. “Why are you thinking these things? Which is easier: to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up, take up your mat and walk’? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins, he said to the paralytic, ‘I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.’ He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all. This amazed everyone and they praised God saying, ‘We have never seen anything like this!’ ” Mark 2:8b-12.

This story raises a lot of intriguing ideas for us to consider. Let me begin the discussion.

Helping others can be messy. It was for these four men who, without a doubt, got their hands dirty as they opened the roof in order to get their friend to Jesus.

Responding to others' needs can disrupt life and create chaos. Sometimes it comes with a high price in terms of time, effort and resources. So why would we do it? Love is always willing to do the difficult. Friends don't leave friends behind, regardless of the cost.

How can we be this kind of friend? This story teaches us that we must have a big heart and lots of faith, the kind of faith that believes our efforts can make a difference in the lives of those that need us.

Speaking of faith, what does it look like? According to Mark, it looks a lot like compassion, determination, patience, creativity, ingenuity and resilience. It can be seen in the passion of someone that wants to be an agent of healing in a hurting world and on the faces of those that rejoice over others' good fortune.

I can tell you what it doesn't look like and that is the condemning, criticizing spirit of the scribes. They could not celebrate with the others that witnessed this miracle because they could see nothing but a departure from tradition, especially concerning the way Jesus dealt with this man's sins. They were incensed that Jesus did not invoke God's name to offer forgiveness, which they believed must precede any healing since illness was the result of sin. Instead, Jesus spoke from his own heart as God's agent for spiritual and physical healing.

Honoring tradition was more important to the scribes than helping a friend or learning more about how God works in this world. For them, custom and tradition trumped compassion and understanding. It breaks my heart to say that sometimes it does for us, too. Defending tradition can become more important than becoming God's agents of healing. How sad!

It can be disheartening when you are criticized, as Jesus was, for helping others. Be prepared for it, though, which is another way that helping others can become messy. There seems to be no shortage of people ready to condemn you if you do not meet their expectations, even when helping friends.

As a matter of fact, this seems to be one reason that Mark included this miracle in his gospel. His readers would take great comfort in this story and its message. They were living under the threat of persecution and the stress that accompanied it. Times were hard and good deeds were met with great resistance. Powerful voices were trying to silence them, which is why Mark reminded them through this story that the voices that promoted compassion and justice were more appropriate than the voices that tried to silence them. They must continue to speak boldly and reach out to those in need regardless of the price they would pay for doing so. Too much was at stake for them to be timid or become disillusioned.

Surely you can see how this story would encourage Mark's readers. They wondered if anyone had ever walked in their shoes and understood their plight. Mark assured them that Jesus had encountered stiff opposition during his ministry, yet he was faithful all the way to the cross. With God's help, they could be faithful, too, and so can we.

Who needs your help? Who needs you to be a friend and lend a helping hand? Who needs you to get your hands dirty? Who needs you to withstand criticism on their behalf? Who will see your faith and be inspired and encouraged by it? I assure you God will, and feel many others will, too. Let's ask Him to help us be faithful this week.