

## **I Need a Miracle, part 2 – “Lame Man Walking”**

*Scripture: Mark 2:1-12*

Psalm 118:24 tells us, “This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.” I hope you are rejoicing this morning. You are surrounded by people who want to know God and want to encourage you. There are people here from all walks of life, some believing, some skeptical, some hoping, and some looking for relief. God sees you, and God believes in you. I expect God to show up in a new way this morning, and I hope you do, too.

Would you please pray with me? Lord, in these moments, would you open our ears, our minds, and our hearts to receive your message? Fill us with the Holy Spirit to move us and change us. Give us the strength to respond to your Word. I pray that the words of my mouth and meditations of my heart would be pleasing to you, O God. We pray this in Jesus’ name. Amen.

How many of you enjoy crowds? This Thursday my family attended the Big Ticket Festival in Gaylord. There were probably 5,000 people there, spread out over the fairgrounds, laughing, enjoying the bands, buying cotton candy and elephant ears. But at about 4 o’clock, the skies darkened and the wind picked up. For a moment, it rained hard, in horizontal sheets. We took shelter in the grand stand and listened to the raindrops bang on the metal roof like one of the bands’ drummers. As I watched, hundreds of people started to disperse, back to their tents or even to the cars to return home. When the rain stopped, we were able to go down to the main stage, literally feet away from the musicians, because most of the crowd had gone.

Your opinion of crowds depends on the setting, doesn’t it? At a concert, it

is great when the venue is full. A crowd brings energy. We look around and see people dancing, singing, jumping, waving their hands, and having a good time. That is when it is fun to be part of the crowd. It is cool because everyone expects to participate in whatever the crowd is doing.

But most of the time, crowds are obstacles. When you stand in line at the bank or the grocery store, crowds frustrate you and prevent you from getting to where you want to go. It is much worse when you need a doctor, or you are on your way to see family. Then the traffic jam really irritates. The long lines of people in the emergency room are an obstacle to critical needs. In those situations we feel justifiably frustrated by the crowds. We don't want to be in the crowd. We want access!

But how often do we think about the people behind us? Have you ever looked thought how many people also have to wait? Are they frustrated and in a hurry? Do they have a critical need? I suspect we hardly ever turn around and notice them and consider their deep needs.

This is not a new problem. In our scripture today, people were crowded all around Jesus. None of them turned around to see what was happening. They did not want to give the paralytic access to Jesus. After all, they had been standing in line long enough! All day long, maybe since sunrise. They knew this prophet, Jesus, was there, and by gosh and by golly, they were going to hear what he had to say! There simply was not time for this paralyzed man to get in line and see Jesus as well. Besides, what could Jesus even do? This man's condition was too impossible for Jesus to heal him, anyway. So the crowd blocked access to Jesus for this man and his friends.

Imagine being inside that house with the crowd. How stifling it must have

been! How close the people pressed to each other, straining to hear what he had to say. Maybe a skinny child could have squeezed in, but certainly not five men, included one who could not even move under his own power!

But this man needed access to Jesus, and his four friends needed to find an unconventional way to get him there. How could they pierce the crowd? How could they get to Jesus in a way that no one else had thought of yet? That is what I look for in crowds. Where is the shortest line? Where are the spots no one is using? How can I get to them quickly? I imagine one of these men rolled his eyes in frustration, and in doing so, he noticed the roof. And he thought, "Wait a second. There's nobody up there."

Most of us probably do not climb roofs on a regular basis, and if you do, you picture tar paper and shingles or tin roofs, 45-degree slopes and gutters. And I am making an educated guess that none of your houses have roofs that are handicapped accessible! But in Jesus's time the homes had flat roofs, covered with sticks, branches and tiles. There was always an access to the roof, via ladder or stairs. The roof was just another room of the house. You might remember in the book of Acts, Peter went up to a roof to pray. (Acts 10)

In elementary school, my teacher, who was also the fire chief, used to let our 2<sup>nd</sup> grade class go down the playground using the fire escape. He was probably teaching us safety, too, but I remember not feeling very safe at all on that sparse, metal stairway, and that was under my own power. Can you imagine four men trying to carry you in a stretcher up 10 or 20 feet? What was that paralytic thinking? Was he saying, "Come on guys! It's not worth it!" Was he even able to say anything? Maybe he was terrified and just prayed, "God, don't let them drop me!"

These four friends were trying not to jostle him or drop him, and then, when they got to the roof, they started opening a hole in it. There was no portal or a skylight. This was audacious! There must have been stuff falling all over the place, right into the house: twigs, leaves, dirt, branches, broken tiles. Maybe some pieces hit folks below, and they hurt! Remember, the house was completely crowded, but I believe when stuff started falling from the ceiling on top of Jesus and the disciples and the crowd, they noticed! The homeowner probably shouted, “Hey! What are you doing to my home?!”

But the friends persisted. And when they did, the crowd moved and made space for this man, not because of their compassion, but because of their discomfort, the stuff falling on their heads. That was significant motivation to move them out of the way and permit others to have access to Jesus.

So what did Jesus do? You would think that Jesus simply healed the man. After all, that was why these four men brought him. But Jesus looked up at the four friends, who risked and sweat and lifted and dug and lowered their buddy down a hole. When Jesus saw their faith, he turned to the lame man and said, “Son, your sins are forgiven.”

This was very unexpected, to say the least. It would be like going to the grocery store and waiting in line for 20 minutes, and when you finally get to the cashier, and she rings up all of your groceries, turns to you and instead of saying, “Your total comes to \$87.12,” she says, “I understand you are having some trouble. You are regretting a bad decision. I want to let you know that God has got your back. God has mercy and grace for you. God accepts you as you are. God loves you.” Wouldn’t that shock you? You would say, “Look, I just want to pay for my groceries!”

It seems as if these actions are completely unrelated. But what if the shock of those comments made you ponder. "Why was I so upset about waiting in the first place? Was it because of some unresolved conflict in my life?" Conflicts spill over into our emotions, our attitudes, and our bodies. It manifests itself in stress and upset stomachs. Conflict and sin hinder our ability to be humble and patient. We start to think that we deserve better, we are better than the others in line.

Do you know that Paul says in Philippians that Jesus never had that attitude? Jesus never considered himself better than others, and he was obedient to God to death, no matter how long he had to wait and no matter how painful it was. (See Philippians 2:5-8) What if when that person spoke forgiveness to you, it released you from anger and impatience? Would you look at the crowd differently? A young mother with a beautiful child would suddenly remind you what it was like when your children were young. An elderly couple standing in line would make you grateful for how long you were married, or are married, or what God desires in your marriage someday. You would see people with different makeup and hairstyles and clothing, and you would remember that God clothes you like the lilies of the field. (Matthew 5:28-30)

It has been said that 10% of our problems might be our circumstances, but 90% is our attitudes. It is not until something falls on our heads and shocks us that we wake up and see the world that God has created and what God is doing in that world! That is when we realize we have been focused on ourselves. We have been lost in the crowd. Our own egos deflate a little bit, and now we can receive the words that Jesus says to us: "My son, my daughter, your sins are forgiven."

I used to think that this story was all about the four friends, and what they

had to go through to bring their friend to Jesus. While it is true that we have a duty to bring our friends to Christ no matter what the cost, I also realize that we put too much emphasis on ourselves. We have this guilty feeling that if we do not do enough, the church is just going to die. But that is not what the story says. This story says when people come to Jesus, they are forgiven. When we experience that forgiveness, we can experience healing, physically and spiritually.

That healing starts in our hearts. Proverbs 4:23 says, "Guard your heart above all else, for it is the source of life." (HCSB) Jesus said, "The things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these things defile a person." (Matthew 15:18) The heart is the place where the healing miracle begins. And forgiveness is better than the best heart medicine the world can offer.

On Thursday, we watched the crowd disperse as the rain fell. Most people were probably upset with this inconvenience. They did not pay for it to rain. They could have just stayed home in their quiet, dry house and lain in bed, and, for all effective purposes, been paralyzed. But there were others who noticed that this rain falling on our heads nourished the grass around us so that the fields were not choked with dust. The clouds shielded us from the hot summer sun. Our family was blessed to sit in the grandstand and stay perfectly dry until the rain had passed. That short delay gave us time to relax. We talked with each other. We had an opportunity to talk with God. That rain actually got our attention and gave us better access to God, the source of our forgiveness.

Jesus does perform miracles. He certainly healed this paralyzed man. But the more amazing thing was that Jesus has the authority to say, "You are forgiven." This man had not sinned against Jesus specifically, and yet Jesus, said "Your sins are forgiven." All of his sins. Jesus took on the priestly role and

interceded between God and people. Jesus can do that because He is the Messiah, the Son of Man, who died for us so that we could be forgiven.

Too often we get stuck in the crowd, forgetting that we need the forgiveness that God offers us every day. Yet when we wake up and accept that forgiveness, the real healing can begin, in our souls and in our bodies. We just need to step away from the crowd and be aware that things are falling on our heads, and these things are actually there to get our attention, not just irritate us or inconvenience us. The stuff that we think is going to hinder us is really going to help us in the long run. Maybe it is grace or mercy that is falling. Maybe it is God's presence or the Holy Spirit that is falling on us when everything else around us seems to be falling apart. The crowd will disperse and give us access to Jesus in a way that we never had before. And when you hear those words, "My son, my daughter, your sins are forgiven," then you have a chance to respond the way same way the man did. You can stand up, pick up your stuff, and walk. You need not linger in the crowd anymore. You are not upset anymore over circumstances, but rather, you focus on the blessings God has given you. Your heart is healed.

We have the choice to go out laughing, skipping, dancing, and clapping our hands. We can say, "Look what God has done!" We can be amazed, and so can the people around us. God will wow them through our lives and our healing, through our words and our actions. God is healing this world, through Jesus Christ. So let the rain fall on our heads. Let the debris of all that blocks us from access to Jesus get ripped up and throw away. If it hits us hard enough to get our attention, all that much better. Then we can notice what God is doing, and help the crowd notice, too. Amen.