



Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. **AMEN**

Tonight, is the third Wednesday in our Lenten series, Created for Community. Our topic is about being in community with our neighbor. Our Gospel from Mark is the story of the paralyzed man brought to Jesus through the roof of a crowded room. It highlights the way in which it takes a community to care for one another.

This story is the first in a series of five controversial ones in the early chapters of Mark, showing Jesus' authority is superior to that of the Jewish authorities. It begins with Mark telling us that Jesus was in the house in Capernaum. We don't know if it was his house, so probably not as Jesus really did not have time for keeping up a house. It might be the house of Peter or Andrew or their families. At any rate people know Jesus is inside and they gather in and around the house. And so, as Scripture says, "He spoke the word to them". As we know, Jesus began his ministry teaching the word with authority in the Capernaum Synagogue. And now He is teaching from a home. Crowds gathered to hear him and possibly hope for a miracle. 2 And enter four people. The assumption is that they were men and that were carrying a paralytic to him. Because the front door is blocked by the crowds, they have to take drastic measures to get their friend on a litter and lower him down to Jesus. Being extremely bold they chop a hole in the roof to lower their friend into Jesus' presence.

Just an aside here, the homes of that day most likely had flat roofs, supported by beams laid across the walls. They would have been composed of a mud/thatch mixture. People would sometimes sleep on their roofs at night because it was too hot in their home to be comfortable. Most homes had a ladder standing by for use to get on the roof. However, it still was a big task to get their man on a litter, on the roof and then down inside the house. I don't imagine that the paralytic was securely trapped on a stretcher with a c collar on like we might see on a TV rescue attempt. He was probably lying there and possibly slid down inside the house. It would have been an uneasy time for the paralyzed man, but his friends think it was worth the effort.

And it just so happens, Jesus sees that these men have the faith in Him to go through all that trouble to present their paralyzed friend to him. It is a faith that certainly had 3 determined

visible action. Know that Jesus can read people's hearts, but he does not need to do that here, as their faith is open for all to see. There is no indication that the paralyzed man also had faith, but to Jesus, that did not matter. It is the faith of the litter-bearers that Jesus experiences. Their faith makes the healing possible. Without the rock-solid confidence that Jesus could help, the man would never have been in the presence of Jesus. Fighting the crowds and demolishing a roof to get to Jesus was difficult but nothing could stop these men from helping their paralyzed friend.

And then we hear in Jesus' passive voice, that his sins are forgiven. We are not sure if Jesus is saying that He forgives the man's sins or God does. But it really does not matter to this man. His sins are forgiven and even though the scribes get into a big discussion as to who has the authority to forgive sins, the paralytic know what has happened. His sins are forgiven even though his paralysis is not yet healed. He has been blessed by Jesus but still needs one more blessing. And so, Jesus orders the man to "Stand up, and take your mat and walk". And so, the man does just that. He stands up and went out into the crowd for all to see that healing has taken place. The people are amazed, and I suspect many came to believe that Jesus was the Son of God and he was capable of not only healing but forgiving sins.

And the good news for us is that Jesus is still here for us today. He forgives our sins and He has the power to heal our spiritual and physical needs. But we need a way to get to Him. And that is the point of this story for us tonight. The friends that brought the newly healed man to Jesus are our faith examples. This man would most likely not have been healed if his friends did not bring him into the presence of Jesus, the great healer. Their faith certainly was the contributing factor in his new ability to walk again.

And folks, that is what friends are for. Friends help friends. So being in community with our neighbors is important. Yes, sometimes it is complicated, but yet beautiful. It is another way in which community is important.

We all know the stories of people who block the way for others to be part of a community. In our story it was the crowds that made it difficult for the men to get their friend to Jesus. How about in a church? It is easy to have instant dislike for the visitor who comes to worship unclean, smelly and unkempt and then he sits in your usually Sunday seat. Unkind words of others can also keep people from Jesus as they make them feel small and unwanted. Or maybe people have had a falling out with someone in a church and that disagreement kept them outside the worshipping community. Or how about children that had religion rammed down their throats by elders and now rebel against church. Or maybe there are people who have never known the church and just feel like they won't fit in. Well, these people are all our neighbors. We must make sure that we not only allow them access to our Lord and Savior, but bring them to Him.

So even though we say that we would love more people here to join us at Christ the Servant, do we really want to add to our circle of faith? Or do we think of ourselves as a fancy country club

that had high dues to pay, social requirement to fulfill in order to enter? Personally, I think that here at CTS we welcome the visitor and those seeking God, very well. But Lent is a good time to look in our hearts and see what kind of neighbors and friends we want to be and make sure our actions to those we meet show our love for all God's Children.

Remember that Jesus commands us to go into the world and make disciples of all. And good neighbors make great disciples as they remember that it is God's church here on 6 earth. They are called to follow Jesus, to be like Jesus: serving, reaching out and sharing the love of God with their neighbors.

Our reading ends with a great sentence to put into practice. "We have never seen anything like this!" Jesus has this amazing love for one and all. It is love for those who are close to him, those who are seeking him and not quite sure how to go about it, and those who don't know that they need Jesus. So, let us care for our community and show God's love to all our neighbors.

Any maybe, just maybe someone will say to us about our little but mighty congregation. "We have never seen anything like this". **AMEN**