

**Mark 2: 1-5 “A New Way” Rev. Janet Chapman 2/15/26**

**Mark Wellman gained national attention by climbing the granite face of El Capitan back in 1989 ...which wouldn't have been so incredible had he not been a paraplegic and was carried several times on the shoulders of his climbing companion Mike Corbett. Corbett trained for the event by climbing it himself multiple times. The newspaper's subtitle read, “Paraplegic and partner prove no wall is too high to scale.” But it didn't stop there. Wellman has inspired other disabled climbers to do the same. In 2012, he joined an amputee and a blind person scaling an 800-foot towering rock formation in Utah, often being carried by his blind friend whom he instructed where to place his hands and feet. There were times, as in any upward climb, where one of the climbers got stuck, unsure of the next step, wrestling with the unknown, and sitting in the dark. So the three worked together to break through the barriers to reach the top.**

**This is the story of today's world in many ways. As Rev. K.I. Kim notes, we live in a time when so many people feel stuck, pressed against barriers they didn't expect. Families are displaced by natural disasters – earthquakes, typhoons, or tornadoes that swallow homes, churches and neighborhoods in a single night. Refugees flee war zones of violence and gunfire. Even closer to home, our neighbors struggle to rebuild after fires and flooding. Paralysis is witnessed in various forms across our nation. Deep fractures of suspicion cause neighbors to struggle to speak across political lines. Public trust and common sense feel painfully thin. Paralysis is seen wherever the wounds of every kind of phobia and “ism” contribute to division and dehumanization. It shows up in the anxiety of economic instability, as ordinary families face impossible choices between healthcare, housing, and hope. And it lingers in the weariness of congregations trying to do ministry in a world that often seems too divided or distracted to notice any hope for tomorrow. This reality serves as a constant reminder that life can change in an instant and that none of us can manage alone. Through it all, we see glimpses of strangers becoming family, offering food, shelter, or simple presence. We see communities carrying the burdens of others, rallying together to raise walls and repair roofs, teaming up to advocate for**

affordable housing as well as decreased utility bills. We see that faith refuses to let unexpected disasters, the bitter fruit of human violence, or the stressors of rising living costs be the final word.

This is why this gospel story in Mark matters so much for us. When Jesus returned to Capernaum, the house was so crowded that there was no room left, not even outside the door. The rumors of Jesus had spread saying, “He’s a great preacher! Lovely voice – speaks with authority.” “You know he grew up not far from here.” “He spoke one time and a man was healed.” The crowd gathered around expecting something might happen they didn’t want to miss. How often do we encounter God’s word with such expectation; how often do we come to worship listening, expecting to see a glimpse of God’s power? Last week, we saw a 4-year-old whose parents were told that due to his autism, he would never clearly communicate as he did at the communion table with his mom. What we witnessed at the table was a miracle, no less. What do you think the four friends were expecting as they approached the crowded home? Their shoulders were aching from the long walk and the rough edges of the mat they carried cut into their palms. As they arrive, they realize the entrance is completely blocked. As they surmise the situation, the crowds turn and stare. In that society, judgment would have been instantaneous, not on the friends, but on the paralyzed man who was obviously being punished by God by his ailment. Either he or his parents must have sinned to cause such paralysis. The friends must have felt the tension, seen the harsh stares being leveled at their dear friend. Inside their hearts, a battle raged. Weariness pushed against hope. Doubt pressed against determination. Maybe silently, they regretted ever suggesting the journey. “Why did I think this was even possible? Maybe the rabbis were right; maybe he really does deserve this?”

Whispered voices of blame and shame echoed around them: “He doesn’t belong here. Healing is not for people like him.” And yet, even as those voices closed in, something deeper stirred within the friends – quieter than shame, stronger than doubt. It was an inner voice that rose out of love and faith, from a refusal to surrender. “No, we can’t leave him outside; not this time. Not when he was left outside so many times before.

If the usual way is blocked, then we try another; if the door is shut, we search for a window. If the ground is too crowded, then we find the courage to climb to the roof. One more step, more courageously this time; one more time, more creatively than before, because love and compassion will not stop at a blocked door.

Somewhere between being stuck on the ground and breaking through the roof, we realize this story isn't so ancient after all – it's happening right now. Because this is not just a story about one man on a mat and four friends on a roof. It's about all of us – how we choose to respond when someone near us cannot move past the barriers on their own. It's about what faith looks like when every path forward feels blocked, when the usual doors of compassion, justice, and community seem jammed shut. In that in-between tension, our faith begins to move again. We witness it in the stories of hope and compassion that rise up out of the ministries of Week of Compassion; when neighbors we know in this congregation are provided financial support after natural disasters; when neighbors we've never met before, who have experienced storms and paralyzing moments, receive unexpected miracles. We are all called to join those four friends on the roof, carrying one another through the storms and paralyzing seasons of our lives. When the world says, "Impossible," faith replies, "We will find a new way, together." When doors are closed, we climb roofs – courageously and creatively. When pathways are blocked, we dig through, patiently and persistently. Every time we shoulder someone else's burdens, whenever we build what has been torn down, however we make space where there was no room before, we are living this gospel story all over again.

As Jesus is speaking about the kin-dom of God coming near, encouraging the crowd to repent and believe the good news, the friends on the roof break through and make an opening large enough to lower the paralyzed man to Jesus' feet. It was certainly unexpected on so many levels. Yet, Jesus' response is quite interesting at this point; he obviously knew how to improvise. There is a story about the legendary jazz trumpeter Wynton Marsalis, someone I was privileged to hear in Dallas back in the 80's. Marsalis was playing a gig one night and in the middle of a song, someone's

cell phone went off, which could have been disastrous. But Wynton didn't stop, didn't miss a beat. He started playing the ring tone on his trumpet and eventually transitioned back into the original melody. He made it part of the song. And that's what Jesus did. He turned the unexpected interruption into part of the message. He said to the man laying at his feet, "Son, your sins are forgiven." Although healing had been expected, Jesus provided forgiveness. Jesus understood something in that moment that we, to this day, still struggle to accept. In order to know complete healing, to know what it's like to be made whole after a tragic situation, you must know forgiveness. True healing will only come when you know that you are in a right relationship with God and those around you. Child, your sins are forgiven, Jesus says to anyone who has blamed themselves or another for their situation. Then at the end of the story, after the scribes challenged Jesus' authority to do such a thing as forgive sins, Jesus gives what the friends had hoped for. He says, "Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or 'Stand up and take your mat and walk'? But so that you know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins" he said to the paralytic, "I say to you, stand up, take your mat and go to your home." And so the man did. Sometimes we must think creatively and act courageously to remove the barriers for true healing to occur.

A woman shared a story with her colleagues at the end of a long day of meetings. "Now all of you," she said, "Imagine that you live in a house by a road on the top of a mountain. There was big rock slide and a large boulder came down right around the corner of this mountain road. Every car that came around the corner crashed into the boulder. Now I understand what you would do – you would run right out and take those people out of the crash, bandage them, and bring them into your house, and you will feed and pray for them. And when they got well, you would send them home. But friends, what I think you might consider doing which would be far more compassionate would be to send somebody out to remove the boulder." We all may see today's gospel story in a different way, but wherever you find yourself, the call is the same: to move, to carry, and to find a new way to bring healing, hope, and restoration. Because there are still crowded rooms, closed doors, and barriers all around us – people waiting to be lifted, neighbors to be rescued, and where love needs to break through. Amen.