

Mark 2: 1-12

When Jesus 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 paralysed 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.' ¹²And he stood up, and immediately took the mat and went out before all of them; so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, 'We have never seen anything like this!'

Commentary: It is easy to miss the real significance of this passage. Certainly the miracle healing is dramatic and amazing. But the controversy Jesus has with the religious authorities (the 'Pharisees') has more to do with the spirit than the body. Jesus' healing is a physical sign of an invisible, inner reality: the forgiveness of sins. This is the deepest longing of the soul, to be freed from guilt, inadequacy, self-loathing, to be free to affirm and love oneself and others from one's heart without walls, boundaries and fears. Nothing less than a miracle is required at times to bring this about. Of course, by declaring the spiritual freedom and empowerment of 'forgiveness', Jesus is bypassing the system of rules and rituals set up by the religious authorities to keep people bound under social fear and threat. Jesus' healing and liberating love is more authoritative than the social fear and threat... For those who will believe in it!

The friends of the paralytic have no hang-ups coming to Jesus and recognizing his divine authority to heal body and spirit. What Jesus admires in them is their 'faith' - their persistence in getting their friend to Jesus in spite of the fears, doubts and potential threats. Their love will propel their faith past the social walls and boundaries, and the physical ones too!

In this season of covid-19, it is easy for fear and threat of contagion to work its way beyond our external health and well-being to our souls. As we feel trapped and afraid we can turn on others, and social distancing can become something more relationally and spiritually sinister in us. We need continual healing and liberation within as much as we need to keep protected on the outside.

Questions: How persistent and determined are you in coming before God for inner healing and liberation to love in this new time we're in? Do you feel you even need it? Do you have faith in what God can do past the walls and boundaries around you and within you?

Prayer: Lord God, I need your healing, your inner freedom, your renewal, even if I am not fully aware of it or feel I have need of it. Clarify my mind and open my heart to my true condition. Affirm me in my strengths and convict me in my weaknesses, trusting that you can transform any weakness into a source of new strength; Amen.