

SERMON MARK 2 TAKE UP YOUR MAT AND COME HOME

April 26, 2026

Over the past few months, many in our congregation have experienced illnesses ranging from the common cold, flu, covid, broken bones, heart surgery, cancer and even the loss of loved ones. In some way, either physically or spiritually, we all are in need of some form of healing. Throughout the gospels, we find stories of the healing power of Jesus. Everywhere Jesus went, people came to Him to be healed. This morning let's look at one of His more interesting healing stories found in the second chapter of the Gospel of Mark, the first twelve verses.

Read Mark 2:1-12

From this passage, it appears that Capernaum was the home base for Jesus' early ministry in Galilee. One of the reasons may have been that two of His disciples, Peter and Andrew, lived there. Life in Palestine at this time was very public. In the morning the door of the house was opened and anyone who wished could come and go. The door was never shut unless someone wanted privacy; an open door meant an open invitation for all to come in.

This kind of reminds me of my mother's house. In the small Southern town where she lived, she almost never locked the door, and when she did, everybody in town knew which brick the key was hidden under. Everybody was always welcome and you never knew who was going to drop in or when. It saddens me that we have lost this sense of hospitality and openness in our lives.

In the poorer neighborhoods of Capernaum, there was no entrance hallway into the house; the door opened directly onto the street. In this morning's story, a crowd filled the house to capacity and jammed the pavement area around the door, with everybody eagerly straining to hear what Jesus had to say.

Into the crowd came four men carrying a stretcher with their friend who was paralyzed. But there were so many people crowded around the door that they couldn't get through. However, nothing was going to stop these men from helping their friend. So, they carried him up onto the roof of the house. Now the roofs of the houses in Capernaum were flat like most of the houses around Santa Fe and many here in Albuquerque. The roofs were often used as a place for rest and quiet, and there was usually an outside stairway leading up to the roof. The construction of the roof lent itself to what these ingenious men wanted to do. The roof consisted of flat beams laid across from wall to wall, perhaps three feet apart. The space in between the beams was filled with brush-wood packed tight with clay. It was easy to dig out the filling between two beams; it did not damage the house very much, and was easy to repair.

Now I have often wondered what Jesus must have been thinking when He saw these men tearing the roof apart above Him. Here was Jesus trying to teach the crowd and all of a sudden,

dust, pieces of clay, wood and straw start falling on His head, probably right when He is trying to make a key point. But what did He do or say? Was He upset? Listen again to verse 5: “When He saw their faith;” He didn’t get upset or criticize them. Instead, He commended their faith and determination. You know Jesus must have smiled when He saw such faith that was willing to overcome any obstacle. Do we have this kind of faith?

This story provides two excellent examples of faith. First, there is the faith of the paralyzed man on the stretcher. He had to believe in Jesus if he was willing to take this risk. He must also have had faith and trust in his friends. Do you have four friends who you would trust enough to lower you down on a stretcher from a roof top into a crowd of strangers and not tip you over? Look on either side of you; do you trust the person sitting next to you well enough to put your life into their hands?

Second, there is the faith of the man’s four friends. They cared for their friend and believed that Jesus could heal him. This is an excellent example of the church today where each one of us is sustained by the prayers and faith of others in the congregation when we are dealing with a physical or spiritual condition or crisis. In a way, we as Christians are all called to be stretcher bearers for one another. Have you ever thought of yourself as a stretcher bearer?

In this text Mark highlights some important characteristics of faith. First, faith involves determination. This man’s friends had to fight their way through the crowd carrying a stretcher. You know how hard it is to work your way through a large crowd. Now imagine carrying a man on a stretcher through a crowd. Then they had to be willing to tear up the roof of another man’s house. Most likely this was Peter’s house, and of all the disciples, Peter was the last one you wanted to get mad at you; remember he’s the guy who later cuts off the ear of one of the men who came to arrest Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. Next, they had to find a rope and lower the mat without tipping it over and dumping the man into Jesus’ lap.

One of the lessons from this story is that action speaks louder than words. It is one thing to wish that a friend feels better and another thing to do something about it. Remember what James said about this in his letter: “Faith without works is dead.” You know I would rather have 1 or 2 true friends who were willing to take action and stand by me than 100 so-called friends who would only give lip service to my need.

There was an article a few years back in the *Methodist Reporter* that said that there were four kinds of bones in every organization and church. There are the jawbones who only talk about what they are going to do or did. Then there are the wishbones who wish someone else would do the work. Next there are the knucklebones who knock everything anybody else does. Finally, there are the backbones who do most of the work. This man was fortunate that he had four backbones for friends. Which are you?

Another characteristic of faith that Mark identifies here is conviction. These men were convinced that Jesus could heal their friend, and they say so in their action and determination. Do you remember what Jesus said about faith and the mustard seed in Matthew 17:20-21? “I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, move from here to there, and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.” The Apostle Paul understood this when he wrote in Philippians 4:13: “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”

One of the best definitions of faith in the Bible is found in Hebrews 11:1 which states: “Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.” In other words, faith says Amen to everything that God says. Faith takes God at His word. If God says it, Faith believes it. Faith is not inherited; it must be experienced first-hand. Faith in God sees the invisible, believes the incredible, and receives the impossible.

In a way faith is and should be part of our everyday life. For example, you go to a doctor that you don't know personally, and whose credentials you have never verified. She gives you a prescription that you cannot read. You take it to a pharmacist you have never seen before. He gives you a chemical compound that you never heard of. Then you go home and take the pill according to the instructions on the bottle without any hesitation. In a way, this is an example of the trust and faith that each of us practice daily.

Faith is also activated in prayer. Prayer is the way by which we lay hold of God's promises. When we pray according to His will and His Word, we are claiming what God has already granted. The real test of our faith is whether we are surprised when our prayers are answered.

And there is nothing like intercessory prayer, lifting up the needs of others in prayer. There are countless examples of individuals praying for someone near death and the person recovers. We have all seen it here in our congregation. This fact is recognized in the medical profession. Studies have shown that patients who have believers praying for them recover quicker and more often. It has been said that there are no atheists in the cancer wards. James 5:16 tells us that the prayer of the righteous is both powerful and effective; thus, we must never underestimate the power of intercessory prayers. This is why we have an active Prayer Chain and prayer ministry here.

Now in this story, we see Jesus coming in conflict with the religious leaders and teachers of the Law. We know that at this time in history, it was a common misconception that illness and disease were punishments and a consequence of your sin. It was believed that if a person was sick, then he must have sinned. In the Old Testament story of Job, his so-called friends told him that his suffering and misfortunes were all his fault; that he must have sinned. To the Jews at this time, a sick man, such as this paralyzed man, was a man with whom God was angry. To

them, the person must first be forgiven of their sins before they could be healed. Of course, this is not true. We may suffer illness or injury due to the consequences of our actions or lifestyle, but God does not punish us.

Because of this misguided belief, Jesus saw that the man needed more than physical healing; he also needed spiritual renewal; he needed love! So, Jesus's first word to him was "Son." In a way Jesus was saying to him: "Child, God is not angry with you. It's all right." Like a child who is frightened by the dark, Jesus removes any fear from this man's heart assuring him that his illness is not a punishment. The healing process had started; because sometimes for complete healing to take place we need to remove any mental or spiritual barriers and get right with God. In other words, let go, let God!

In verse 6, we have one of the first indications of the growing tension between Jesus and the religious leaders. When Jesus tells the man that his sins were forgiven, they are shocked and thrown into disbelief, because they believed that only God can forgive sins. So how can Jesus do this; they thought this was blasphemy. But they did not realize that this was the Son of God.

But as usual, the religious leaders met their match in Jesus; He always outsmarted them and was always one step ahead of them. Jesus knew what they were thinking, so He said: "Why are you so skeptical? Which is easier to say to this man, I forgive your sins or to say get up and walk?" Remember the religious leaders firmly believed that this man was a sinner and could not be healed until his sins were forgiven. Thus, the only way that Jesus could prove that the man's sins had been forgiven was to heal him.

So just to make sure that the religious leaders recognized that He was the Son of God, and that He had the authority and power to either forgive sin or heal, or do both, Jesus turns to the man and tells him to take up his mat and go home. The man is immediately healed and walks out of the room. Jesus' authority to forgive sins is confirmed, and the Jewish authorities could not argue or deny His power.

Jesus tells the man: "Child, I love you. Your sins are forgiven." The man is healed spiritually. Then Jesus tells him that because of your faith and the faith of your friends, get up and walk. The man is healed physically. This same kind of healing is available to each one of us today, if we have the faith and are willing to come to Jesus. But you must be willing to come, come to Jesus. We must also be like this man's four friends and be willing to bring others to Jesus who are in need of healing.

In closing, let's quickly review this story again. You hear that Jesus is back in town, so you rush over to see Him and find that you cannot get in because of the large crowd. You stand at the front door, feeling the press of late arrivals pushing to get a closer look. You hear the sound of Jesus' voice and the whispers of those around you who comment on His words.

Suddenly you become aware of shuffling feet and people moving. You hear someone shouting: "Make way, make way!" Then you hear footsteps on the outside stairs, and scratching and scrapping that tell you something is happening on the roof.

Suddenly the silence inside the house becomes obvious. You slip just inside the door to see a stretcher being lowered through the ceiling. Then you see a man lying on the stretcher that now rests on the floor at the feet of Jesus. Neither the man nor the people on the roof speak a word, but you can hear their pleas for healing in the expression on their faces. Jesus bends over, and you lean forward to hear what He says.

Stop the story here and reflect upon your own circumstances. Can you find yourself in the middle of the crowd? What keeps you from drawing closer to hear Jesus' words? Whom are you bringing to Jesus for healing today? If you were the person on the stretcher, what healing would you hope for? What's holding you back from experiencing the same healing as the man in the story? What words would you want to hear Jesus say to you?

The healing power of Jesus is available to each of us. Faith can overcome any obstacle in life. All we have to do is believe and accept the healing grace of the Lord. This morning Jesus is telling us: "Take up your mat and come home; let me heal you of whatever is holding you back from really living life as it was intended." During the closing hymn or after the service, I invite those who are willing to come forward, and let us pray for your healing or the needs of a loved one or friend. Come as your heart leads you. Amen