

“We Have Never Seen Anything Like This!”

Mark 2:1-12

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Jesus encountered a lot of people whose wounds were obvious: a person with paralyzed legs, a person with leprosy, a person with seizures. What makes him a different kind of healer is his concern for the deeper, less visible wounds. He is glad to tend to the more visible wounds, but it is his choosing to deal with the spiritual wounds, the emotion wounds, that cause the crowd to cry out, “We have never seen anything like this!” In this sense, Jesus was one of the early psycho-therapists, one of the shaman whose eyes penetrated the presenting ailment and identified a deeper illness.

In the story for today from Mark’s Gospel, the presenting issue is paralysis. A man’s legs don’t work anymore! His friends go to an extraordinary length to bring him to Jesus. I’ve heard of many ways of getting the doctor’s attention, but lowering a guy through the roof of a house takes the cake! What the four friends see is that this man needs an advocate. This man’s legs need repair.

As Jesus meets this man and hears his story and listens to his heart, he understands there is more to this man’s brokenness than his two legs. There is some deeper, unnamed brokenness that requires a word of forgiveness, a word of grace. This man is carrying some shame, some guilt, some regret. In the presence of Jesus, this spiritual wound comes to the surface. For those in the crowd, it would have been enough for the legs to be healed. But for Jesus, this is not enough. For Jesus is concerned with the whole person: the body, the mind, and the soul.

The invitation of this story is to identify with the one lowered through the roof, to be in that fellow's shoes, to be in touch with the deeper wounds, to be conscious of the need to be forgiven.

I've had any number of experiences one might name as religious experiences. Seeing the Grand Canyon for the first time. Pinning a corsage on a date for the junior prom. Plunging into the waters of Lake Malawi, those ancient waters of the Great Rift Valley. Witnessing the birth of a child. Holding the hand of a loved one as she exhaled her last breath. But for me, by far, the most profound religious experiences have come when someone has had cause to say to me, 'I forgive you.'

Those three words are like a crow bar. Do you know what a crow bar is? It's a long bar of steel. It is a lever. It is used to lift heavy stones that could not be lifted by human strength. We used to use a crow bar to raise huge rocks out of grandfather's potato field. They are for heavy lifting. The three words, "I forgive you," are for heavy lifting, lifting the weight of shame from a troubled heart. Anyone can speak these words! It is Jesus who speaks them in the Bible story. But anyone can speak them. You don't need a college education or a medical school diploma or a master of divinity. You just need a tongue. Or you could use sign language. Or you could put the words into writing. These words, "I forgive you," have the power to heal the soul. They have the power to establish peace. They have the power to transform a wound into a strength; a failure into a success; a darkness into a light.

If, after reading all the historic creeds of the church and all the pages of the Bible and all the sermons of the great preachers; all you remember is these three words, "I forgive you," you will have what you need for your discipleship. For to be a peacemaker, a reconciler, a spiritual healer, is to have the courage to announce, "I forgive you." When Jesus spoke these words to the man lowered through the roof, it caused quite a stir.

It got him into some serious hot water with the authorities. But, I would submit, that these were the words that put into motion a whole new way of being.

When the crowd realized the meaning of what they were witnessing that day, they cried out, “We have never seen anything like this!” I tell you: whenever I witness anyone forgiving another from the heart, I feel like shouting out loud, “I HAVE NEVER SEEN ANYTHING LIKE THIS!”

This is how the story was speaking to me this week. As always, I share my reflection with you in the greatest of hope. Amen!