

“Raising the Roof”

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Mark 2:1–12 (NRSV)

We're here tonight to raise the roof!

Raising the roof (as we learn from the gospel) is not so much about getting under the rafters, grabbing hold of a truss, and pushing it up. It's not so much about making the kind of annoying noise that a rude neighbor would make by playing loud music at a late night party.

Instead, raising the roof is about digging below the surface of our own fears of disease, digging through the denial that catastrophic illness couldn't happen to us, digging into our souls to find the moral courage to help our neighbors, and digging through the obstacles (like poverty, prejudice, and bureaucracy) that keeps 47M people (including loved ones and neighbors) from the healing and the more abundant life which God wishes for all people.

In doing this work that we are about tonight, we are like the friends who bring the paralytic to Jesus.

To dig through the rubble to get to Jesus and his healing message, we must dig through prejudice and misunderstanding and note that Jesus **was NOT saying that suffering is always the result of sin.** Unlike the Scribes and Pharisees—the religious teachers and lawyers of his day—Jesus did *not* presume that bad things only happened to bad people.

Of the 72 accounts of Jesus' healing ministry recorded in scripture, only 2 passages make reference to human sin at all. Rather than “blaming the victim” for their infirmity or sickness as the Scribes and Pharisees did, Jesus taught that bad things happened to both good and bad people. Rather than blame victims, Jesus spent his life healing the sick and suffering.

The primary way that Jesus accomplished his healing ministry was through compassionate touch and empathetic conversation. He healed people in body and soul, and restored the sick and infirmed to their communities. We are about the same business here tonight.

As we dig a little further into the gospel story and into the healing ministry of Christ, we see who was (and who is) in need of healing. Most read or hear the story about who's in need of healing and presume it's the paralytic. But if we dig deeper we realize that the paralytic's friends need healing, the crowd needs healing, and the whole health care system in Jesus' day was in need of a cure.

When we look at the way that Jesus dealt with sick and infirmed people, we discover that it is not just the person who is paralyzed or the Person With AIDS who is in need of healing; it is not just the woman who's found a lump in her breast or the grandfather who can't remember his grandchildren's first names; it's not just the one who has been diagnosed with mental illness or a genetic disease; it's not just the alcoholic or the addict; not just the abuser and the survivor . . . it's all of us who are in need of healing.

As we count the growing numbers of people in our country without affordable and accessible health care, we know that it's not just people who are sick who need a cure, not just communities that are crippled by poverty—it's our whole health care system.

Remember how the crowd pressed in to see what Jesus was doing? Remember how hard those friends worked to dig through the stones and packed earth to see Jesus? They were bringing their friend to Jesus, not just for his sake, but their sakes. Their friends' malady was a source of suffering for them too.

Remember how difficult it was for the paralyzed man to get to Jesus? Remember how hard they worked to gain access to the Physician for their friend? It wasn't just their friend who was in need. It was not just the friends who needed help. Their whole health care system was on the brink of collapse. Their health care system—like ours—was in need of a cure.

None of us has all the answers about how to heal all that ails our community and our health care system, but like the paralytic's friends, we have come tonight to pray, to press, and to participate in our democratic process, so that our community might experience the healing that Christ offered all the people—not just the rich and powerful—and to gain a glimpse of the more abundant life that God dreams for all people.

Friends, believe the good news of the gospel, by our presence here tonight. By raising the roof here tonight, healing has already begun in our lives and our community!

Let us pray . . .

O Divine Healer, help us to dig beneath our prejudices about the marginalized that would lead us to blame victims for their suffering. Help us get beneath our fears of sickness and death that would keep us in denial about our own existence, and the needs of others. And help us to dig beneath our wavering sense of self-worth, so that we might find our voice, claim our need for healing, and find the moral courage to provide for the wellbeing of all people. Amen.