

“Jesus and the Paparazzi”¹

Mark 2:1-12 (Jesus heals by coming through the roof!)

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This biblical story, told by our healing prayer team, is a multi-dimensional healing story. Our attention is *heightened* as we visualize those who accompany the man—his family, neighbors, or friends—we do not know which. Four of them carry him *horizontally* on a pallet, which is a stretcher-like object. What are they doing? They are trying to reach Jesus. They reach the house where Jesus is staying, in Capernaum, and what do they find there? A huge crowd, all pressing in to get to see or to be with this charismatic healer, this prophet, this Jesus, who has just returned from a speaking engagement that lasted a couple of days.

In your mind’s eye can you see the crowd? Some of the people are ill, like the man who is being carried, and they, too, want healing. Others are followers of Jesus. Some are there to find fault with this Jesus-who-doesn’t-always-follow-the-rules. They want to report Jesus to the authorities. Some in the crowd are curious—eager to get a glimpse of this religious phenom. Some are paparazzi—there to capture more data to spread around the town.

This horizontally-carried, evidently-loved, man is described as “paralyzed.” Why do I say “evidently-loved”? Because this man’s physical condition would have denied him full status as a member of the Jewish religious community way back then. He would have been ostracized. The people with him care about him enough that they risk being ridiculed even for associating with him. That’s why I say he was “evidently loved.”

What should this man’s entourage do, now that they see they cannot even get to the door, due to the crowd? They *must* get to Jesus. This man *must* be healed. They *must* get inside that house. Aha! One of them, who would make a great church Trustee, thinks outside the box. This is the idea: take off the roof of the house! What? Climb up and over the stairway on the outside wall, and then pull off the wooden beams that are covered with branches and sealed with mud. Make a big hole, so all four people and the man, on his stretcher, could be laid down, right in front of Jesus.

How ingenious is that? Actually, it is not too much more ingenious than what many who are disabled come up with today, for people in wheelchairs sure have to be creative to get into some buildings!

You see, this is a multi-dimensional healing story. The *horizontal* man is lifted *up, over and down...* all with the intent that the man himself will *get up from lying down*, will move from *horizontal to vertical*.

Much more than that, this story is **about** *multi-dimensional healing*. As the story goes, this beloved man **is** healed physically. Yet, he gets even more. Jesus, risking the criticism of some of the crowd, seems to have healed other dimensions of this man’s life as well.²

When a friend says to you and me, or a healing prayer team member, “Pray for healing,” we often jump to the conclusion that *physical* healing is what our friend wants. Certainly, it is wonderful and convenient to be physically able-bodied.

However, all of us know that having fully functioning body parts is only one dimension of health. We are multi-dimensional persons, and we are most vitally alive when we have health in all our dimensions.

Jesus healed emotions and relationships. Jesus healed individuals within their communities. Jesus healed people in relationship to their past, and he healed people in relationship to their future. Jesus was a multi-dimensional healer, because we humans can be broken in each of our God-given dimensions.

This multi-dimensional healing story is situated in the Gospel of Mark, right along with other situations in which we see Jesus getting himself into controversies. Eight controversies in fact! This particular controversy is over who (on earth) has the authority to “forgive sins.”

This is the only *healing story* in which Jesus says, “Your sins are forgiven.” The people—those there to be healed as well as the paparazzi, who are there to see what’s happening--are excited about good healers. They’ve seen them before; they need healers, and Jesus is a very good one. It would not have been a controversy if Jesus had just said, “Pick up your bed and walk.” This would mean that Jesus is a healer, and that’s okay. It is good. Healers draw needy and curious crowds.

What was NOT okay was that Jesus said he forgave this man’s “sins.” You and I need some explanation; at least I did. Why is it a problem, a controversy, for Jesus to forgive sins?

It is a controversy because the people at the time believed that only God had the authority to forgive sins; Jesus seems to be claiming Divine authority.

Probably many in that crowd thought there was some connection between “sin” and “sickness.” If a person does something wrong, they may get sick. We still think that way ourselves sometimes. And, there is some truth to this view. If we put our hand over an open fire, we are very likely to get burned. If we drive a car while drunk, we may have an accident and hurt ourselves. However, it is *also* the case that people can have disabilities or sickness due to the bad behavior of *someone else*. The drunk driver may hit another car, and hurt that other driver. Or, a person may have a transmittable disease, not communicate that to the people around them and infect other unsuspecting persons.

Sometimes there **is** a cause and effect between sin and sickness, but the cause is the bad behavior of another person, not oneself.

However, a HUGE amount of the time there is zero connection between sin and sickness. Life is complex, and brokenness, things that hurt us, do occur. Most of the time, we are very wrong to blame the victim.

Notice that Jesus did not say that removing this man’s sin would remove his sickness. He said, “Your sins are forgiven,” but he did not seem to make a causal connection. He simply named forgiveness first. Some righteous onlookers asked why he did that, why he did not just say, “Get up and walk?”

Jesus did not seem to place any prerequisite on this healing. The man is not required to state his faith or anything about his belief.

My view: Jesus cared about multidimensional healing. He healed physical bodies *and* he cared enough to heal other dimensions of persons as well.

The best way to think of this passage, I think, is that Jesus tries to make sure that this man, who has such a devoted group of people around him, is healed *not only* in body, *but also* emotionally, mentally, and relationally. *Jesus did not just heal this man; he*

healed all those persistent ingenious dedicated people who were standing really close to this guy.

Think about these words of Ernest Hemingway:

**The world breaks all of us
then some become strong at the broken places.**

You and I know today whether we are experiencing any brokenness in any dimension of our lives. You and I have the opportunity to grow strong in the places where we have been broken.

I think of this as similar to when we miss an answer on a test of some kind. It is precisely THAT answer that we will remember from then on. I did not know that the speed limit by a school is 25 mph and missed that question on my drivers' test. So I have remembered the speed limit by schools for decades. What we do wrong in any area of life, if we learn from it, helps us to grow strong in that place.

Maybe those of us who are really strong today have had many broken places!

Many people who have a physical disability of some kind are healthy in virtually all other dimensions of their lives. A disabled clergywoman who wrote the book, *The Disabled God*³ shouts this truth from her rooftop: **“people with disabilities ... are shot through with unexpected grace, overwhelming joy, and love returned.”**

Plenty of people with disabilities are whole in all other dimensions. I may have told you before of my good friend, Joann Gilmour, who had polio when she was 18 and is paralyzed in her legs and left arm. She has lived a fantastic life—walking with a cane until she was 65 by swinging her legs. Now she is living a full life in a wheelchair. Occasionally a religious person has told her he or she is praying for her to be healed. She says, “I thought I was.” She was healed in every dimension—except the physical one. Except that with control only of her right arm, a cane, and the ability to balance she walked for almost 50 years. One time when she went to see a new doctor for a check up, he said, “How did you get in here?” She was Christian Educator at a church for two decades, then was office manager at our seminary--doing more with her one arm than most of us with four functioning limbs. She is filled with compassion, patience, grace bearing, and she has wonderful relationships. I am deeply grateful that she was our children's Sunday School teacher for several years. She is healthy, and her legs and one arm do not move.

No matter whether we are on depression medication or are naturally filled with endorphins; whether we are able to run up the Philadelphia Art Museum's steps as Rocky did or are carried into a house on a mat; whether we are lonely or overloaded with friends and relatives; life continues to be messy, unpredictable, AND beautiful.

Biblical commentators point out that Jesus was impressed with the faith of the horizontal man's *friends*. *They* needed to get to Jesus with their friend because *they* believed he could be healed.

Sometimes “healings” do not happen. Physical healings do not occur. Some of *those* times when the body is not healed, *other* dimensions become so strong that the desire for physical healing becomes background to the joy in the rest of life, which becomes foreground. (For example, there is some nagging illness or physical limitation, but a grandchild is born, and whew, with all that joy and laughter, health concerns take second place to loving the grandchild.) We might say that the joy in one dimension shines a light that affects if not heals other dimensions.

However, sometimes physical healings or healing in other a dimension does not seem to occur. Why? Why? I am convinced it is not that our prayers have short-circuited. **Our prayers are one more tug on the love-thread that holds all creatures together, with God tugging the hardest on that love-thread. Yet some things are mysteriously not healed.** Why? Why? Though we do not know, what we can do is to keep loving and also to keep reflecting upon **what to pray for that would encompass more and more dimensions of life.**

This sermon, like the scripture passage, is filled with questions. I have another one: Would you let others go through the roof for you? I have learned repeatedly that I need others, and we all learn this need for others and gratitude for others, especially as they help us to heal in some way.

Jesus did heal the man physically who was carried on the stretcher by his friends, and that challenged the community to realize the absurdity of shunning any one of its own members.

As we all help each other to *move* around better in this world of emotions, memories, and anticipation, we could say that we dance with the One who has authority to heal us in various dimensions of our lives.⁴

We here at Redlands First Church are one outpost of the “Body of Christ,” and the really crazy good thing is that we ingenious and persistent friends will often go through the roof for each other, even people we barely know, trusting that the healing power of Love links up with God, and that Love touches us all on all levels.

¹ The word paparazzi was introduced by the 1960 film *La dolce vita* directed by [Federico Fellini](#). One of the characters in the film is a news photographer named Paparazzo (played by [Walter Santesso](#)). In his book *Word and Phrase Origins*, author Robert Hendrickson writes that Fellini took the name from an [Italian](#) dialect word for a particularly noisy, buzzing [mosquito](#). In his school days, Fellini remembered a boy who was nicknamed "Paparazzo" (Mosquito), because of his fast-talking and constant movements, a name Fellini later applied to the fictional character in *La dolce vita*. **Paparazzi** is a plural term (**paparazzo** being the singular form)^{[1][2]} for [photographers](#) who take [candid photographs](#) of [celebrities](#), usually by relentlessly shadowing them in their public and [private](#) activities. Celebrities claiming to have been hounded by such photographers often use "paparazzi" and even "stalkarazzi" as a [pejorative](#) term.^[3] News agencies commonly use the word in a broader sense to describe all photographers who take pictures of notable people.¹

² Kathy Black , *A Healing Homiletic: Preaching and Disability*, Abingdon 96

Brett Webb-Mitchell *Dancing with Disabilities: Opening the Church of All God's Children*, United Church Press 96

³ *The Disabled God*

⁴ A Psalmist⁴ wrote, “You have turned my mourning into dancing...O God, I will give thanks to you forever...”