

Walking Away from Hurt

[Mark 2:1-12](#)

Dr. M. Craig Barnes
Sunday, May 12, 2002

[Real Audio \(3 MB\)](#)

The greatest hurts in life are the ones we cause to ourselves. That creates guilt, and guilt will paralyze you, making it impossible to keep walking with God. The only cure is to hear that your sins are forgiven.

Our text today begins by telling us that Jesus was at home in Capernaum. We don't tend to think about Jesus having a home. We assume he was just on the road all the time. But Mark makes a point of telling us that, while Jesus conducted his ministry in Galilee, he would sometimes return home for rest.

Home is the place you belong. It's the place you go to find sanctuary and know that you are okay. Shortly after the events of September 11, a woman told me she was so shaken, she had to go back to her home in Alabama to walk the ground on which she was raised in order for the world to make sense to her again. That is what home does. It's where the axis mundi is found. It's the place that holds earth to heaven. In the words of T.S. Elliot, it's "the still point of the turning world . . . where past and future are gathered together." That kind of home isn't always the place you were raised. More often it's the place you're still trying to find.

Jesus' home had a door that was open to the world. So people crowded into it to hear him teach and watch him heal the sick. They came to Jesus because, even though they had spent their whole lives in Galilee, they still weren't really at home. They had not yet found the still point where heaven and earth meet. So they filled the home of Jesus.

Four of the people at the back of that crowd were carrying a man who was paralyzed on a mat. When they realized they were never going to get their friend in front of Jesus by standing around in the crowd, they came up with a new plan. With amazing commitment and ingenuity, they climbed up on the roof of the house, cut a hole, and lowered the paralyzed man down in front of Jesus. Can you imagine this scene? It's a good thing Jesus was raised as a carpenter because later he was going to have to deal with that hole in his roof.

Never one to miss the moment, Jesus looked up through the hole and saw the four men holding ropes. He got so excited about their faith that he said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven."

We need our friends to survive the journey through life. We need them for companionship, encouragement, and support. We need them for help when we are overwhelmed, for comfort when we are in grief, and for celebration when we are full of joy. (Have you ever tried to celebrate by yourself? It's pretty hollow.) But most of all we need our friends when we become paralyzed with shame and guilt.

A friend is not the same thing as an acquaintance or a political asset. There are lots of popular people in this town who don't have a single friend. A friend is someone to whom you can confess when you are stuck in a mess. A real friend is someone to whom you can confess when you are stuck in a mess of your own making.

Perhaps you've made some bad financial decisions, and you're in big trouble. Or your child is so angry at you for your failures in parenting that you don't think he'll ever get over it. Or your marriage is an empty, loveless, drudgery. Or your drinking has gone from social to chronic to addictive. Or your job is sucking the life out of you, but you've let your expenses get out of control and can't afford to quit. You're stuck. You can't move.

It feels like the world is caving in on you, and heaven is far removed from you. Which means you have no sanctuary at home. In fact, home may be where the crisis is. So without a sanctuary you just carry this inescapable burden around all the time. When your acquaintances see your countenance, they can tell something is wrong and ask, "How are you?" But you know they don't really want to hear about it. So you smile thinly and put on the face to meet the faces you meet. But your soul longs for a true friend. Because when you're paralyzed, only a friend will do whatever it takes to get you up and walking again on the journey home.

What is it that these friends do for their paralyzed friend? Do they reassure him? "Oh, it feels bad now, but the sun will come out tomorrow." Do they try to fix him? "Well, what you need to do is... Well, have you thought of trying..." No, every time we give our friends advice, we're giving tips on walking to the paralyzed. They can't move! They are in over their heads. They are in over your head. If they call on you, be a friend. Carry them to Jesus. Lift them high, so the healer will see them.

We call that prayer: lifting our friends before Jesus. It is the most powerful thing you can do. Ask anyone who has been in trouble, and there are three things they remember about their friends. The first is that they came in a time of need. The second is that they were not horrified by what they discovered. And the third is that they prayed. In those prayers the friend did something about it. Something powerful.

I don't know what was going on in the mind of the paralyzed man as he was lowered from the roof, but I imagine he was pretty embarrassed. We prefer to get to Jesus all on our own. That is why we keep talking about personal faith, which is a term the Bible never uses. Before the faith is your faith it is first our faith. And some days it is only their faith. That day will come for every one of you. There will come a time when you don't have enough faith, or hope, or strength. In those times, you have to lean into the faith, hope, and strength of others. Remember what Mark tells us: "When Jesus saw THEIR faith, he healed the paralyzed man, saying, 'Son, your sins are forgiven.'"

Now there were some religious experts standing nearby who were startled by this sentence. Frankly, so are we. The man is paralyzed. So why does Jesus forgive his sins? We know from other places in Scripture sin is not caused by sickness. Job did not sin. Most of the healing in the Bible had nothing to do with sin. Once when the disciples found a man born blind, they asked Jesus if this man or his parents sinned, and Jesus said, "That's a bad question." So why does Jesus heal this man by saying, "Your sins are forgiven"?

It is because he is making a point. And the point is that which cripples us more than anything else is our guilt and shame. We have guilt because of what we have done and what we have left undone. We have guilt because we got worried, tried to take over for God, and made a bigger mess than what we were worried about. We have guilt because we violated the holy laws of God that graciously served as boundaries of limitations.

We don't actually break God's laws. They are still standing whether we obey them or not. To try to break God's law would be like trying to break the law of gravity. If you try it, you'll discover the law always wins. No, we don't break God's law, but when we violate it, the law breaks us. That is what guilt and shame are all about. Until we know we are forgiven, we will never walk again. We will certainly never make it home.

"Which is easier to say?" Jesus asked the Pharisees and Scribes. "'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Stand up, take your mat and walk?'" It is as if Jesus is saying, look, we can talk about healing if you want. Or we can talk about the psychologically complex explanations for guilt. We can talk about Freud's social constraints, Jung's dark shadow, or Maslow's self-actualization. We can talk about wholeness, self-esteem, victimization, and the other things that aren't offensive to anyone. But at some point somebody has to start talking about forgiveness, because it is the only way to get rid of our guilt.

Guilt is the great universal disease of the soul. We have all infected ourselves with it, even those protesting religious leaders who were repressing their guilt with moralisms. And guilt is the hardest disease of all to heal. Hearing that you are forgiven is the only antidote.

This means that the thing we most need from our friends is the declaration that in Jesus Christ we are forgiven. There are so many things we can do for ourselves in the spiritual life. We can read the Bible,

pray, serve, and even worship. But when it comes to hearing that we are forgiven, we all need a faithful priest to speak the words to us. The point of the Protestant Reformation was not to do away with the priesthood, but to turn all believers into priests who can offer absolution.

When you have finally found the courage to tell a friend the truth about your guilt, the last thing you want to hear is that you're not so bad. What you want to hear, what you have got to hear, is that you are forgiven. It's the only way you are going to get back on your feet.

After hearing that you are forgiven, the only thing that follows is to repent. Repentance simply means turning around. In the words of St. Augustine, "Turn from the bed that had taken charge of you, for now is the time to take charge of your bed." Or in the words of Jesus Christ, "I say to you, stand up, take your mat and go to your home." Isn't it striking that this text begins by telling us Jesus is at home and it ends with him telling the paralytic to "go to your home."

Go to your home. You are not stuck anymore. You are not stuck with your sins or with your guilt. You are forgiven, freed! Leave this storm of your own making. Stop trying to manage your guilt and just walk back to sanctuary. Go to the still place in the turning chaotic world. Go the new home where heaven and earth intersect -- where you live by grace.

"And 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.'"

Lord God we wasted so much time trying to manage our guilt. We have never heard anything like the grace of being forgiven, healed, and restored. Give us ears to hear that we too might rise, take up our mats, and go home. Amen.