

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH



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“Postures”
Based on Mark 2:1-12

I need to be honest with you. The passage in Mark is not one of the lectionary scriptures for this day. The healing of the paralytic by Jesus has been one of my favorite passages since I was a young child in Sunday School. I can still picture sitting at the table in room 5 with my teacher discussing what this passage meant to me. I don't remember what I said; it is most likely that I thought it was neat that the friends had to dig through the roof. This passage is known for being approachable in part because of the tangible nature of the story.

Another reason for my selecting this scripture is because two months ago I was given the themes and scriptures for church school at West Hartford, with the task of pulling together resources supplemented by my own experience. The healing of the paralytic was the planned theme for September and is what children in Kindergarten through 5th grade are now exploring in rotation Sunday School. This month the kids are acting out the story and bringing a friend to Jesus; they are creating model houses with flat roofs that can be dug through, and they are using the computer to create invitations for friends. In this experience they will use various postures and stances. They will sit and have opportunities to hear the story and one another. They will stand and actively

participate in retelling the story. And they will have the opportunity to give their praises to God in song and prayer.

Today as we explore this passage together I invite you to think about your own posture of faith. I am not referring specifically to that posture many of our parents spoke to us about when they gently reminded us to sit up straight, or when my gymnastics coaches reminded us that if we didn't have good posture we could try walking around with a yardstick next to our spine for a while. The postures of faith I hope we can explore are ways of living our faith and life as interconnected parts of creation.

What will it take for us to come to Jesus? For the man paralyzed it took friends who found a new way. The obvious path was not possible. Sometimes we need fresh eyes to help us see alternatives that we may be unaware of.

In the passage we encounter the scribe sitting and questioning in his heart. Sitting, we might even envision someone today sitting with their arms crossed as to signal that they are taking everything in – well, maybe not everything. When I read about the scribe and how he sat watching and waiting for the moment to share his opinion, I also remember some I know who are patient enough to sit and observe. The scribe reminds me of the planners and organizers who are great at dotting all the 'i's and crossing all the 't's.' If I keep on this path I must also acknowledge that many seem to comment on my organization, but I don't want to be like the scribe.

Okay, sure, there are times I do like to organize and plan. There are even times I find myself sitting with my arms crossed. Maybe there is a need for this

role. Maybe there are times we need to sit and think. There may even be times we will question. It seems that if we didn't have the antagonist this story would not provide a choice. The scribe functions in many ways, including signaling the beginning of the tensions between Jesus and religious leaders in the Gospel of Mark; tensions that eventually lead to the cross. In the larger story told by the author of Mark the scribe signals a choice. In the end we do not know what happened to this scribe that sat and questioned. Mark concludes this story by relating that *all* praised God. Might there be a possibility that this one who had questioned in his heart also came to know the one who stood in front of him?

"Touching Spirit Bear" by Ben Mikaelson is a young adult book that was nominated for a "Nutmeg Award" in 2006. It tells the story of Cole Matthews, who was sent to an island as punishment for a choice he had made. On the island he was mauled by a bear that no one believed existed. This same bear opened the way for Cole to heal once he let go of his anger and his control. Similar to the scribe who sat waiting for the right moment to counter the good works before him, Cole waited for the moment he knew that he could care about others. His life was interconnected with others. Questions help us by providing a choice, by providing viewpoints and perspectives.

Earlier I noted that I did not want to be like the scribe who just sat. This next posture seems on the surface to be the place I would rather find myself. It is that of the friends, the ones who put their faith in action. The ones ready to offer a hand - in this case to literally dig through a roof! I want to be the friend.

Standing ready we hear about four people willing to carry their friend to Jesus, only to be met with obstacles. No problem, for these individuals knew how to problem-solve; if the doorway is blocked why not go through the roof. Seems logical, doesn't it? Now, we might want to remember that the type of roof that is being referenced was not made of plywood and asphalt shingles well attached and insulated due to the cold snowy winters of Connecticut. The roof may have been of clay and straw feasible for digging through. Most likely it would have been a flat roof that would be easily accessible through outside stairs or a ladder.

The actions may seem unusual because of our frame of reference, but in any case these four individuals were ready to take on what needed to be done. Their posture was a stance of action. They stood ready to carry, dig, and do what was needed to meet the needs that they were aware of. It was a posture of Social Justice, a posture of Active Faith.

In this congregation and wider community there are so many ways to live out one's faith, from feeding the hungry with "Loaves and Fishes" and "Foodshare" to building projects like the one we will be hearing about later today in the Gulf Coast. The children are even putting faith into action with Church World Service school kits. Other expressions of active faith could be our involvement with Covenant to Care, ABCCONN, the World Mission Offering, Fellowship offering, the work of the ABW, our teachers giving their time and energy to nurture the children, and so many other ways individuals put their faith into action. Today I want to challenge all of us to explore how we can increase

our hospitality within our community, amongst our visitors, and farther into the community, our lives, and creation.

I am not suggesting that we go out looking for someone to bring to church on a stretcher. The challenge is about continuing the momentum from the welcome that we receive. For some it might involve inviting a friend to church, for another it might mean intentionally talking to someone they don't know, and for another it might mean sending a note to someone who could use a kind word. We know that all are called to share the gifts that they have been given. As unique creations we need one other for the body to be whole. Paul spoke about various parts of the body and how all is connected and one through the spirit. Desmond Tutu in "*An African Prayer Book*" writes "We are made for complementarity. I have gifts that you do not; and you have gifts that I do not. *Voilà!* So we need each other to become fully human." How are we as a body of diverse individuals called to put our faith into action today? How will we take a posture of standing ready to carry and dig?

Now we come to a third stance. Some may find this position easy on the surface. It is the position of the one lying down. After all, the friends are the ones who did the work, right? And Jesus is the one who forgave and told the man to stand up. All the man on the mat had to do was go for a ride. Or maybe that posture is challenging too.

Has anyone ever participated in a trust walk? Or rappelled off a cliff? In a trust walk one is often blindfolded and led by another, sometimes up and down stairs, sometimes in and around many obstacles. It takes trust to not peek, and it

takes openness to try a new thing. For those who have rappelled you can likely share stories of the first step backwards off the side of a cliff or building. Once again one must trust the rope and the people who secured it.

For the paralyzed man held captive by legs that would not let him stand up, he was the recipient of faith lived out through others. Lying down was a vulnerable place to be, being lowered through the roof into a crowd raised the stakes even more. The stance of lying down was the posture of open faith, of trust, and a willingness to receive. At times it can be easier to give than to receive, but there are times we are called to open ourselves to an opportunity to be healed and carried by others. Trusting is risky, but it took the open stance of lying down to provide an opportunity for others to put faith in action. It took one person's trusting posture to provide the scribe, and us, a challenge to think about.

There is no time like the present in which to live. We have gathered here in community so let us show that community by welcoming one another, maybe even someone we do not know.

Take time to greet one another

As we find a seat again you can remain standing as you are able. Just as the paralyzed man found wholeness and began with the crowd to offer praise, may we do the same. "He went out before all of them; so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, 'We have never seen anything like this!'" May God be praised!