

WELCOME 10th March 2024 – 4th SUNDAY IN LENT '24 B

Psalm 8:1-9 & Mark 2:1-12

Welcome! It's great to be together again today! Along with your worship order you have **Growing Praise** inserts & **Bible Study Qs...** The goal is for worship to be an all-week experience as God leads you into the fullness of His word & his work in your life & then introduces you to someone this week who needs to hear that word from you. We also use them for our **Zoom** Bible Study Catch-ups Friday 1p.m.

As we move into this week...

What one thing in your life, if **IT** were “fixed,” would transform everything else?

Health? Finances? Work? Family? (marriage, kids, generations) **Habit/Addiction? Age?**
Common thought for most of us: “If God would just get rid of **THIS** obstacle then I could...”

In today's gospel we see one version of that thought...

While Jesus was preaching God's word to them,
four men arrived carrying a paralyzed man on a **mat**.

The 4 are thinking, “If Jesus can just do this...”

“The man jumped up, grabbed his mat, and walked out through the stunned onlookers.”

Between his entrance as a “paralyzed man” & his exit carrying his own mat, obstacles are demolished & Jesus transforms a life forever revealing that Disciples, willing to overcome any obstacle so people are transformed by Jesus, **ARE** doing His **works**.

Motivated by love & driven by a faith that believes only Jesus can give people the life that enables them to flourish we walk w/ Jesus such that all we are is absorbed in him... we trust **HIS WORD** about God & about you to determine your identity & shape your life & walk **HIS WAY** everywhere you are every day you live. To follow Jesus is to live how he would deal w/ people & circumstances in your life as if he was you; overcoming any obstacle so people are transformed by him.

Let's pray & then live God's Word together...

PRAYER OF THE DAY:

God of healing & wholeness, we come with thanksgiving for all the evidence of your goodness & mercy - found not only in stories of old, but in our lives today. Lives bruised with tragedy find consolation when touched by your gracious Spirit. Lives scarred with suffering or rejection have hope renewed through the power of the living Christ. We praise you for hearts & lives transformed by your grace & strength & we pray that our lives will reflect your kindness. Arouse in us a love like yours so that we reach out to this wounded troubled world with the compassion of Christ, proclaiming the gospel with boldness & integrity to friends & strangers alike. This we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Let's hear & put our hearts into God's Word...

FAITH CHAT: 1st 2 QUESTIONS JUST BETWEEN THE 2 OF YOU...THE FINAL ONE WE'LL SHARE TOGETHER

1. Who regularly leads me to Jesus? If the answer is “no one,” why?
2. Who am I leading to Jesus? If the answer is “no one,” who would you like it to be?

What do you hear, see, or discover from the Holy Spirit in that conversation?

What obstacles or roadblocks need to be overcome?

“

4TH SUNDAY IN LENT '24 B – DISCIPLESHIP BEGINS WITH A “W”: WORKS

When Jesus returned to Capernaum several days later, the news spread quickly that he was back home. Soon the house where he was staying was so packed with visitors that there was no more room, even outside the door. While he was preaching God's word to them, four men arrived carrying a paralyzed man on a mat. They couldn't bring him to Jesus because of the crowd... This has been gnawing at me for the longest time...

That must have been some crowd...Who do you think is there? Let's take a stab at it: I'd bet the **Curious** were there & just want to ask questions. I'm sure the **Bored** were there just looking to be entertained. We know Jesus' **Enemies** were there looking for leverage/ammunition against him. Surely the **Devoted** were there, hanging on every word. Who else? Whoever else...Every one of 'em...**Every** last one was an obstacle to someone who desperately needed Jesus. *While he was preaching God's word to them, 4 men arrived carrying a paralyzed man on a mat. They couldn't bring him to Jesus because of the crowd...* Whoever's there...for whatever reason/excuse...they're an obstacle to the paralyzed man on his mat & the 4 stretcher bearers. Here's a guy genuinely in need of Jesus & the mob is packed in so tight & so rusted on/anchored to "their spot" the guy is stuck outside...away from Jesus...An obvious need & no one thinks, "Hey, make a hole so this guy can get in"? Really?

I mentioned last week how I grieve every time I see/hear the church make it harder for people to get to Jesus. Every financial misdeed, sexual wrongdoing or outright Biblical/theological/doctrinal fraud...or insignificant theological dogfight that has no weight in the wider world...(who gets ordained, music, carpet, buildings, pews, altar gear) I die inside because I hear the world...See. It's all a scam. They don't believe what they say. Whenever we live like someone we know is beyond the pale...we communicate "there's no room here for you" just as surely as the mob in the house. When we never offer someone a living witness to our faith, never take the name of Jesus on our lips or attribute to him our blessings or our hope; we set up an impenetrable barrier that keeps people waiting outside the door. Whenever we pretend truth doesn't matter & "nice" is the essence of the gospel we leave people unable to be drawn into the transforming power & love & life that only Christ can give.

I have a shelf-full of books that convict me about the obstacles the church seems to throw up & the not-yet-Xn world takes as signs that there's no room...**LIKE HERE!** An obvious need & no one thinks, "Hey, make a hole so this guy can get in"? And all we know about him is he's paralyzed...accident, foolishness, illness, attack? Don't know. All we know is 4 guys carrying his stretcher are convinced Jesus can heal him & they can't get through the door because no one else seems to give a hang about the need of the person they're carrying.

But those 4 guys...& we have no idea who they are w/re to the man on the mat except they're carrying him to Jesus...those 4 **random** guys are the picture of **Outrageous Faith**. They can't get through the crowd that's packed up like the Intnt'l security check at Kingsford Smith Airport so they dig through the roof...unroof the roof...mud, dust, bird feathers, sticks, & straw come dribbling down into the room...they dig their way in & lower the guy on his mat in front of Jesus...whatever that looks like...**NB:** paralyzed guy may not even have asked for this, but there they are convinced Jesus can heal him. Why else go to all the trouble unless they believe Jesus can make a difference & restore fullness to this guy...make his life flourish. *Seeing their faith, Jesus said to the paralyzed man, "My child, your sins are forgiven."* You can't get away from this...

1st...**THEIR** faith is what Jesus **sees**. What did Jesus see? Perseverance, tenacity, persistence, sacrifice, determination, creativity, risk, doggedness...4 randoms speak nary a word but give evidence by their "unroofing" skill to outrageous faith...to the unwavering trust that Jesus can make a difference & restore fullness to this guy...make his life flourish. All they really did was remove the obstacles that prevented this paralyzed man from getting close enough to Jesus for Jesus to change his life forever. Motivated by love & driven by a faith that believes only Jesus can give people the life that enables them to flourish, disciples remove the obstacles so folks can get close enough to Jesus for Jesus to change their lives forever. Think back to the 2nd FaithChat question Who are you leading to Jesus? If the answer is "no one," who would you like it to be? What obstacles can you remove so your faith in Jesus ushers them into his presence so he can change them forever? What kind of perseverance, tenacity, persistence, sacrifice, determination, creativity, risk & doggedness does Jesus need to see in your faith so he can act in their lives? Check this...

2nd...**Seeing** their faith, Jesus said to the paralyzed man, "My child, your sins are forgiven." What? Surely that must be a mistake. They misheard. Jesus misunderstood. Nobody asked for that. The presumption in the room & on the roof is something like "Be healed!" Everybody. Everybody. Everybody is expecting some version of "Let me get this." Nobody is expecting... "You're forgiven" to be the game changer... Remember how we started? **If** God would just get rid of **THIS** obstacle then I could... How many "thises" do you think you conjure up in a week? (family, \$\$, health, church, circumstances, shame, guilt, loss, job/boss/spouse) If I asked you in 6 months, would you have different list? 6 minutes? See...Jesus knows full well what you **think** you need to make your life complete. But Jesus knows what you need. Jesus can meet any & every need but he always meets your deepest **need**. Always. Hear me? Always.

I'm gonna guess you/I are at least somewhat alike...What I know about me & what I see all too often in the people I hang out w/...these hearts are never content...We

will always latch onto something new/enticing for security - fulfillment - happiness – completeness - satisfaction. It is that unceasing indiscriminate grasping Jesus seeks to still/fill w/ himself...his grace...his love...his presence...his Spirit. Jesus invites you to trust that he knows better than you do. He knows your problem. He knows your need & by his life/death/rez/rule for you/me he addresses precisely what we need. Restored relationship w/ the Father - righteousness not our own - grace upon grace - blessing upon blessing – peace this world cannot give & victory over sin & death & evil. Whether we were expecting it or not, wanted it or not, **“My child, your sins are forgiven”** IS the game changer...Forgiveness restores our place as a child of God. Forgiveness closes the distance ^{b/i} where we are & where God the Father, who made us in love for his love, desires us to be. Forgiveness is the gift we receive & are then called to share as freely as we have received it. Forgiveness restores us to the glory God bestowed on us from the beginning:

...what are mere mortals that you should think about them, human beings that you should care for them? Yet you made them only a little lower than the angels & crowned them with glory & honour. You gave them charge of everything you made, putting all things under their authority... Fmr Jesuit priest Brennan Manning wrote: **“We** should be astonished at the goodness of God, stunned He should bother to call us by name, our mouths wide open at His love, bewildered that at this very moment we are standing in his presence.” **“My child, your sins are forgiven”** does just that...it draws us into the Father’s presence as his very own beloved child...w/o it we remain outside...at a distance...paralyzed.

But...**Jesus** turned to the paralyzed man & said, **“Stand up, pick up your mat, & go home!”** The man jumped up, grabbed his mat, & walked out through the stunned onlookers. They were all amazed & praised God, exclaiming, **“We’ve never seen anything like this before!”** This is **what Faithful Obedience** looks like: **Stand up/The man jumped up - pick up your mat/grabbed his mat - go home/walked out through the stunned onlookers.** Exactly what Jesus said do...he did. Transformed by the power of Jesus, the man responds wholeheartedly in obedience to Jesus’ command. Much like the guys still on the roof working out a repair plan, obedience simply allows Jesus to direct our lives...for them obedience resulted in outrageous faith that removed the obstacles preventing this paralyzed man from getting close enough to Jesus for Jesus to change his life forever. This man now is restored to life maybe one he could only dream of.

Here’s a thought...**Do** people ever look at your life as a disciple & say, **“I have never seen anything like this?”** Why not? What don’t they see? What don’t they experience? What obstacles or roadblocks need to be overcome? I’ve intentionally avoided talking about the religious leaders sitting there hoping Jesus would say something

they could use against him...but just a minute...**NB:** **“My child, your sins are forgiven”** IS the game changer. BUT forgiveness only has impact if you believe you need it. The one who pronounces forgiveness, is the one w/ authority & power. More to the point, the one who forgives is the one w/ the power & authority to judge. Forgiveness, always holds w/in it an assumption of the need for forgiveness. The folks who were not at all tuned into/turned on by Jesus were not willing to concede to Jesus such authority or admit their own need, especially not from him. **“Who has the power to forgive other than God?”** According to them, Jesus blasphemed.

And THERE is a tragedy that replays over & over again to this day. In their refusal to admit need or acknowledge Jesus’ divine power they miss the very event of the healing altogether. A man who has been paralyzed is healed, restored, made new... Life has been regained. Joy has blown out the rest of the roof & all 4 walls. Yet that passes them by. They miss the grace & wonder of God right before their eyes! I understand...I hate it but I understand. They had a clear understanding of how God was supposed to do stuff. They had a box for God. They had assumptions about divine power & what God & they should do. So they missed the unpredictable irrepressible love of God that is always doing new things through unexpected people, all for the sake of healing, comfort, grace life joy hope...Do people ever look at your life as a disciple & say, **“I have never seen anything like this?”** Why not? What don’t they see? What don’t they experience? What obstacles or roadblocks need to be overcome?

Motivated by love & driven by a faith that believes only Jesus can give people the life that enables them to flourish, disciples remove the obstacles so folks can get close enough to Jesus for Jesus to change their lives forever & **ARE** doing His works.

TAKE IT HOME- As you leave today, be specific & share w/ your neighbour...

Who is the person in your life God is telling you, **“Bring them to Jesus?”**

What are the obstacles & how will you remove them so that happens?

Let us pray...Lord Jesus we trust your presence in us knowing that in you is the Father’s greatest grace. Lead us in bold obedience that those we know in this broken world are ushered closer to you. Make us signs of your kingdom & agents of your saving love & grace. Let people see you in us & be transformed by your power which makes all things new & grants life in its fullest most flourishing. We pray in your holy Name...Amen