

Weekly Devotion for August 10, 2020
Pastor Matthew Woods, Grace Lutheran Church

“With Friends Like These”

I was watching a show the other day called Dr. Pimple Popper. This woman pulls things out of her patients that would make most people squirm. The episode I watched featured a man named Genner who flew all the way from the Philippines because he suffered from a very large cyst growing on the top of his nose. Of course, Dr. Lee (Her real name) was able to remove it and return the man’s nose to its former shape.

Prior to the surgery Genner spoke about how for fifteen years he had become extremely self-aware of this cyst. He even wore masks just so people wouldn’t stare at it. In the same episode, April, a mom of three had been living with a genetic condition that causes bumps to grow all over her arms. She found that it was genetically passed down from her father and was worried sick that her son may have the same problem along with the stigma that came with the condition. Dr. Lee removed 68 various sized globs of stuff that looked like raw chicken from both arms. Each time I have caught the show I have watch the patients like these express the same thing. They are very conscious of their flaws. In their attempted hiding from the public they become very lonely, guarded, and isolated. Thankfully, those like Genner and April are strongly supported by their families and their friends which makes their suffering slightly tolerable.

One finds out who their friends are when they face a long-term illness. And the best of friends are the ones that are still there when the worst of things come. With this mind I invite you to turn to Mark 2:1-5. “A few days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come home. ²They gathered in such large numbers that there was no room left, not even outside the door, and he preached the word to them. ³Some men came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them. ⁴Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus by digging through it and then lowered the mat the man was lying on. ⁵When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralyzed man, “Son, your sins are forgiven.”

Jesus comes home to Capernaum and folks far and wide crowd the house to overflowing. Verse three starts off with “some men came, bringing to Jesus a paralyzed man, carried by four of them.” Who were these guys? First, look at their devotion to this man. Having had an uncle who was quadriplegic I have some idea of the level of care that is involved.

From the moment that my uncle woke up he was dependent on a trusted aide or his wife to show up in the morning, get him out bed and into the powered wheel chair, cleaned up, dressed, and fed and later in the day reverse the process. The commitment was total. It was a lot of work for the aide and a lot of concern for the family. He did actually learn to drive again. I’ll share that with you some other time.

These four men were probably late to the party because they, no doubt, had to complete some kind of preparation to get their friend cleaned up, dressed, and out the door. Not only so but the man’s condition probably meant that the mat they carried him on was soiled and stale at best. This is an important fact because these men did not concern themselves with becoming unclean by touching the mat. These four dedicated men didn’t worry about that. They could throw the mat away if they could just get to Jesus. So, each one grabbed a corner and headed down the street.

So, they came carrying the paralytic to the house. Everyone is crowded in to see Jesus; no way those four guys are getting through the crowd and none are eager to make room for this paralytic. In a very real sense this man’s brethren willfully became an obstacle to this man. It’s a small town—everyone probably knows everyone else and everything going on. And remember this was an era where it was believed that if you were sick you or a relative probably sinned and therefore deserved your condition (See John 9). The teachers of the Law definitely believed this man was a sinner because of his condition and many others mostly likely did too. That was the thinking of the day. And it should not be lost on us that the first thing Jesus does for the man is forgive his sins and then He heals him to prove to the critics

that the forgiveness has taken hold. This may be partly because the people in the town knew this paralytic and held a belief that the man or his parents had sinned to bring this on.

These four friends thought nothing of the sort. They knew him and they believed Jesus could help him. Their compassion for this man was unstoppable. They cared about the paralytic. They cared that he had their help. They cared and, in their caring, did something about it. And notice the paralytic trusted them to give it a try. All these four determined friends knew was that they just needed to help their paralytic friend. And that meant get him to Jesus at all costs. That is the best kind of friend.

We see the depth of their love, compassion, and their faith that Jesus could heal the man in their determination. They would not wait for Jesus to come out and chance missing Him. And if they couldn't go through the crowd they would go over it. They muscled the man up to the top of the roof and began to dig. The roof was likely made of dried mud and sticks. They likely had to find tools to hack away at the hard, dried mud and the sticks that the roof was constructed of. And it must have been a bit disturbing for those inside who were no doubt having dust, mud, and stick fragments fall on their heads. They had Jesus' attention now, totally disrupting Jesus' teaching. Finding some rope or perhaps using their own robes they lowered the man through the hole right in front of Jesus, who I believe is smiling from ear to ear at their display of faith.

The effort is rewarded in full view of everyone who didn't make room for this man and his four friends. The paralytic is forgiven and then healed. "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home." Now who's carrying the mat? He carries his own mat much to the joy of his four friends and to the shock of the teachers of the Law. After that, every time those in Capernaum saw this man, they didn't think of a sinner but of a miracle performed by Jesus. He was a witness to Jesus just by walking around.

Thank the Lord for good friends and family. Good friends gladly risk Covid to make a difference. Good friends are loyal in good and in bad. Good friends keep coming around when everyone else has faded back. They are initiators because the paralytic in us tries not to bother them too much. "I'm fine" doesn't stop them from doing something for us. Good friends are willing to hurt our feelings if necessary and cut through our garbage and occasionally rip us a new one when we need it. Good friends never stop caring. They are supportive and make it a point not to miss important events. Good friends and family are a blessing and I would encourage you to stay close to them. Those like the four men in Mark 2 are the best kind. With these kinds of friends, we will know Jesus much better.

Of course, none is more of a friend than Jesus. Jesus' death and resurrection go much farther and accomplish much more than we will fully realize on this side of creation. But we will soon enough realize just how good Jesus is to us once we cross over into heaven. No one needs a mat or wheelchair or a Dr. Pimper Popper there. Jesus loves us even with all of our flaws, sins, and problems but in heaven those are all removed because of the cross. He remains with us when all others would abandon us. He is a friend that gives generously. When you call Him, He is ready to listen. His love for us is eternally complete. What a friend we have in Jesus! May the Lord bless us with friends like those in Mark 2. And may the Lord bless us to be that kind of friend to someone who needs us to help carry them a little while too.

And now the Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make His face to shine on you and be gracious to you. The Lord look on you with His favor and give you His peace. Amen.

Pastor Matthew Woods
John 3:30