

That's What Friends Are For
Psalm 26:1-8
Luke 5:17-26

As I pondered this passage in Luke, I reflected on the compassion and deep friendship the friends of the paralytic had. They cared for this man so much that they were willing to do whatever it took to bring him healing. We know nothing of why he was paralyzed. Perhaps he was born that way, or maybe he suffered an accident while working to build something. The text doesn't say. Nor will we ever know. But however he became paralyzed, the fact was that he needed good friends to help him and he was blessed to have them.

On many occasions I have known of a family where a child is in deep need of care and healing. Heart problems and leukemia are more common in children that I wished they were. Some of the children I have known of eventually died and others made it through the struggle and are alive today. But in both cases, one thing stood true: all of their families went out of there way to do whatever was necessary to bring hope to their desperate situations. Perspectives change when a life is at stake.

This must have been how the friends of the paralytic felt about him. They were willing to do whatever was necessary to help him. When they found out that the great healer and miracle worker, Jesus, was in town, they just knew they had to get their friend to him ASAP!

So they carried him to the house where he was teaching, but were unable to bring him to Jesus on account of all the crowding persons. So now what? They had brought him all this way, they could not give up yet. Then one of them suggests bringing him to Jesus through the rooftop. Rooftops in the time of Jesus were not permanent entry-proof roofs. Most modest home roofs were made out of a horizontal bed of branches or beams mixed with earth or limestone plaster. It was common for them to have to be repaired during dry seasons so that they would last during wet seasons. It would not have been extremely difficult to peel back the roof and lower the paralytic on his bed in front of Jesus. Yes, it would have taken some effort, but not for these friends who were determined to get him to Jesus.

So they did just that. They peeled back the rooftop and lowered their friend down to Jesus. The obvious display of desperation and care for this man must have made an impact on all those who witnessed it, and especially to Jesus. For he saw just how much faith they had in him and his ability and he immediately forgave the man of his sins.

But wait... that is not what the men were seeking, was it? Surely they wanted him healed of his physical ailments and not his spiritual ailments? This is where we have to stop and ponder why Jesus forgave his sins first.

Perhaps it has something to do with the fact that Jesus knew that common culture and understanding led people to believe that sins were the cause of physical problems. Some would have argued that the man was a paralytic because of his own sins. Others might have argued that his paralysis was the result of his parent's sins. But most outsiders would have looked at him and thought that somewhere someone must have done something sinful for him to be in such physical shape. This kind of thinking often led to those with physical ailments being cast aside or exiled from the communities in which they lived. This is why persons with medical issues were seen as unclean and unfit to be in holy and sacred places of worship. Restoration of physical wellness often went hand in hand with restoration of spiritual and cultural acceptance. So by choosing to forgive the man first, Jesus is making a powerful statement that his sins are not connected to his physical state of being. Neither his sins nor the sins of his parents or anyone else were the cause of his paralysis. This would have been a powerful statement for those who were witnessing this event. Jesus was poking a hole in their worldview and working to correct their negligent thinking.

Or perhaps Jesus was making a statement of what was more important in life. Was it more important to forgive this man of his sins or give him physical healing? The first deals with eternal life and the second deals with temporal life. In this case, both were needed, but which one was truly more important? A physical healing would help the man here and now, but a spiritual healing would help the man not only here and now, but also in the life to come. Spiritual healing benefits us more than we may realize. There are times in our lives and things in our past that we struggle with. The assurance of God's forgiveness goes a long way in relieving our fears and bringing peace to our lives.

In A Forgiving God in an Unforgiving World, Ron Lee Davis retells the true story of a priest in the Philippines, a much-loved man of God who carried the burden of a secret sin he had committed many years before. He had repented but still had no peace, no sense of God's forgiveness.

In his parish was a woman who deeply loved God and who claimed to have visions in which she spoke with Christ and he with her. The priest, however, was skeptical. To test her he said, "The next time you speak with Christ, I want you to ask him what sin your priest committed while he was in seminary." The woman agreed. A few days later the priest asked, "Well, did Christ visit you in your dreams?"

"Yes, he did," she replied.

"And did you ask him what sin I committed in seminary?"

"Yes."

"Well, what did he say?"

"He said, 'I don't remember'" What God forgives, God forgets.¹

¹ David H. Bolton. <http://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/f/forgiveness.htm> (accessed August 23, 2011)

This paralytic may have received the physical healing that he needed, but more importantly, he received the spiritual healing that would affect him deep down inside. He was given healing inside and out. His friend's sought healing for him. They did what they thought was best for him: to bring him to Jesus. Trusting in Jesus, they presented their friend to him. Jesus, in turn, did what was best for the paralytic. First, he healed his spiritual and emotional needs. Then he healed his physical body. This passage reminds us that when we come to Jesus for help and healing, we need to trust that Jesus knows what we really need. And if we are truly a friend of others, we need to be a friend in their time of need and bring them before Jesus as well. Perhaps the man dying of cancer will never receive physical healing, but Jesus can provide him with spiritual healing. Let us therefore trust in Jesus and know that we can come to Him in prayer. We can lift up others in prayer and know that He has the power to heal and healing comes in many forms—sometimes physical, sometimes emotional, sometime spiritual, and sometimes healing inside and out. In Jesus, our healer, we trust. Amen.

Prayer:

Forgiving and Healing God,

Help us to trust in your healing power and know that you have the power to provide healing where you deem it is necessary. Help us to trust in your will and be grateful for the healing we receive. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.
