“High Five!”

Mark 2:1-12

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We find ourselves with another healing story this week.

This time it is a paralyzed man.

If you grew up in Sunday school, you probably remember this one.

But for as loved as this story is, there is a lot we don’t know about it.

We don’t know a lot about the man’s situation.

Like how he became paralyzed.

Was he born that way?

Did he experience a trauma that caused the paralysis?

We don’t know.

We also don’t know much about what life looks like for him.

Is he married?

Does he have children?

We don’t know.

What we do know, is that he has a debilitating condition.

He is paralyzed which means he likely couldn’t work outside the home.

Making him homebound.

He likely couldn’t take care of himself,

Relying on others to feed and clothe and bathe him.

Life in those days was hard enough, but this condition would have made it exponentially harder.

I have to wonder if this paralyzed man ever felt like he was burden to others.

Did he ever wish he could just hide from his situation?

No longer relying on others?

I suppose I’m looking at this story through the lens of my middle class, white culture.

Where I too often see people do anything they can to not burden others.

This happens quite a bit in our “pick yourself up by the bootstraps” kind of culture.

We don’t like to trouble others with our baggage.

We don’t like having to rely on others.

We don’t want to upset or worry anyone.

So, more often than not, we keep our troubles to ourselves.

We isolate our pain and our worries from those around us.

Just so they don’t have to be bogged down by them.

This sort of behavior is causing an epidemic of sorts in the state of Utah.

That heavily Mormon culture is struggling with a very difficult issue.

Prescription drug abuse.

Overdosing on prescription drugs has become one of the leading causes of death in state.

Rising 400% over the last decade.[[1]](#footnote-1)

This is a bit shocking, given Utah’s reputation for being a wholesome, family oriented place.

But there is a secret epidemic that is wreaking havoc on their communities.

A young woman who was interviewed about her addiction said she felt so much pressure to be perfect.

Her church and her family had high expectations which she just couldn’t meet.

Like her, many people try dull their depression or anxiety, by turning to pills.

Which too often leads to addiction.

And in the church, especially the Mormon Church, there is a secret shame when it comes to drug addiction.

It goes against everything they are supposed to be about.

And because people are afraid to admit they have a problem, they don’t reach out for help.

Causing far too many deaths because people overdose on the prescription drugs.

This problem spirals out of control because it starts with such a taboo behavior.

One that is heavily frowned upon in the Mormon Church.

But before we raise our eyebrows at this problem in the Mormon Church, we ought to recognize that this could just as easily happen in the Presbyterian world.

We too fail to help those who struggle.

Whether it’s with mental illness or addiction.

Or a scary diagnosis or disease.

We buy into that independent spirit of the “pick yourself up by your bootstraps” culture we live in.

Making it harder for those who are suffering to be vulnerable.

Making it harder for them to come forward for help and support.

Our story for today speaks against this way of thinking.

This passage tells of a man who had no choice but to let others support him.

No choice but to let others in on his situation.

He wouldn’t survive without the help of others.

What we find is four friends would go to great lengths for him.

Four friends who cared for him deeply and want to see him get well.

They must have heard about what Jesus was up to out in Galilee.

Now that he’d returned home to Capernaum, they took advantage of their chance to see Jesus.

To present their friend to Jesus for healing.

But they weren’t alone.

Dozens, perhaps even hundreds of people also heard Jesus was back in town.

They all gathered at his house to hear him teach and to seek his healing.

It was a standing room only crowd – packed so tight no one else could get in.

It reminds me a bit of a time I went to the Austin City Limits Music Festival.

They booked a band on a small stage, not realizing that this band would rise to fame shortly before the music festival.

So it was a very popular band on a very small stage.

The crowd had very little room to see the stage, and my friends and I somehow got stuck in the middle.

Literally stuck.

For about 5 minutes, we couldn’t move forward or backward.

It was just a wall of people all around us.

When I think of this crowd at Jesus’ house that day I think of that wall of sweaty, stinky people in the Texas heat.

Realizing, they couldn’t get into the house, these four friends of the paralyzed man look for another way.

They just had to get Jesus to see him.

They find some rope somewhere and climb up to the roof.

They dig away at the mud and straw, making a hole big enough to lower him in.

They literally take the roof off the place!

This high five take a huge risk in doing so.

They lower him down, slowly and steadily, knowing he can’t brace himself.

They set him down in front of Jesus and hope for a response.

Jesus does respond, but not in the expected way.

The text says that Jesus saw their faith.

Not the faith of the paralytic lying before him.

Jesus doesn’t appear to be struck by the patient himself.

He notices the faith of the four people up on his roof.

The ones who went to great lengths to get their friend what he needed.

Jesus saw their faith, and was moved by it.

Not the faith of the paralytic.

I wonder, did the paralytic even have faith that he could be healed?

Did he even want to be presented before Jesus?

Or was he so resentful of his situation that he’d given up all hope?

I have to wonder, if after all these years of other people caring for him.

Feeding him, clothing him, bathing him.

Helping him to the bathroom, even.

What if after all those years he’d just given up caring?

That was a long time to be in such a vulnerable position.

Surely it wore him down.

Wore his faith down.

Not really paying attention to the man lying at his feet, Jesus is fixated on the men peering down through that hole.

He sees their faith and declares that the man’s sins are forgiven.

This is a declaration which probably meant way more to the man than curing his paralysis.

In those days it was thought that illness like leprosy or injury like paralysis was caused by a person’s sin.

So this man must have felt a great burden, thinking it was his sin which made him physically disabled.

To be told his sins are forgiven lifted a huge burden from him.

Next we see that he is cured of his paralysis too, after the scribes question Jesus’ authority.

Giving this man complete freedom from what bound him before.

No more sin, no more paralysis.

All thanks to the faith of his four friends.

It is their faith that gets Jesus’ attention.

Which leads us to think about our situations today.

What would happen if we shrugged off that “pick yourselves up by the bootstraps” mentality?

What would it look like if we let our community support us through our difficulties?

Whether it’s a physical challenge, like this man with paralysis.

Or a mental challenge like depression.

What if, rather than hide our condition, hide our anxieties.

What if we let others in?

What if we let others take care of us?

Journey with us on our difficult roads?

The man with paralysis had no choice, really, but we often do.

We often have the choice to tell others when we’re facing a diagnosis.

Or feeling overwhelmed.

Or feeling lonely.

We have this choice to be vulnerable with others, letting them in on our story.

What we might find is an overwhelming response from our friends.

Just like the response of those four friends up on the roof.

The ones who had faith on behalf of that man, and found healing for him.

We might find a similar faith from our friends, our fellow church members, when we let them in.

When we tell them we’re afraid of what the biopsy will tell us.

Or when we’re fed up of chronic pain and illness.

Or when the darkness of depression becomes too much.

Rather than face it alone, we can rely on our community for strength and for healing.

Jesus may have cured that man with paralysis, but the man’s healing began with his community.

In the help of his friends and the faith they displayed on his behalf.

They were the ones who overcame all obstacles to help him find healing.

Likewise, if we allow others in, they might just be our source of faith and healing.

Because, as we see in this story of a man and his four friends, Jesus has a way of working through others to give us healing.

God has a way of bringing healing through surprising sources.

What a remarkable gift it is, to be part of a loving community.

One in which we can rely on each other.

One in which we can bring healing to one another.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

1. http://www.health.utah.gov/vipp/topics/prescription-drug-overdoses/ [↑](#footnote-ref-1)