

First Friends Church, a Quaker Meeting  
Rev. Dr. Loletta M. Barrett  
February 21, 2021  
Overcoming Paralysis  
Mark 2:1-12

Reading

When he returned to Capernaum after some days, it was reported that he was at home. So many gathered around that there was no longer room for them, not even in front of the door; and he was speaking the word to them. Then some people came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them. And when they could not bring him to Jesus because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him; and after having dug through it, they let down the mat on which the paralytic lay. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven." Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts, "Why does this fellow speak in this way? It is blasphemy! Who can forgive sins but God alone?" At once Jesus perceived in his spirit that they were discussing these questions among themselves; and he said to them, "Why do you raise such questions in your hearts? <sup>9</sup>Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Stand up and take your mat and walk'? But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins" —he said to the paralytic— "I say to you, stand up, take your mat and go to your home." And he stood up, and immediately took the mat and went out before all of them; so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, "We have never seen anything like this!"

Message

The paralytic. That's all the identification we have. No name and nothing about the person; just a body that cannot stand or carry a mat. Over the centuries it is the only identity. Oh but wait! We also know there were four companions but we don't know if they were family members or friends. In the end the paralytic stood up and immediately took a mat and went out before all of them. The first action was not thanking the four or Jesus. Instead, the former paralytic went out to new life focused on tasks given by the Master.

Unlike some people Jesus healed, we have no information about why this person was paralyzed or how long the condition lasted. Loss of motor function in muscles accompanied by loss of feeling may result from damage in the nervous system, especially the spinal cord. It can include; physical trauma, stroke or disease such as polio, or exposure to a drug, toxin, or poison such as botulism or animal venom. In REM sleep we all experience temporary paralysis. There is also such a thing as *Pseudoparalysis*; a restriction or inhibition of motion because of pain or another cause that is not muscular. It can be caused by extreme mental stresses, including panic anxiety disorder.<sup>1</sup>

Whatever the cause, paralysis is real. Not being able to stand up means you cannot walk or carry your own mat. You are forced to rely on others to do things for you that you want to do for yourself. Or even for others. You have no choice when you are paralyzed.

In the Bible we see many paralytics healed. Matthew reports while he was traveling in Syria Jesus healed everyone who was sick, in pain, demon possessed, epileptic or paralyzed. Jesus healed the paralyzed servant of the centurion who was in terrible agony -by proxy- because the centurion believed Jesus could do so without even entering his home.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paralysis>

The disciples inherited this healing ability from Jesus. In Acts they healed many who were lame or paralyzed. Peter even healed Aeneas, a Greek not a Jew, who had been bedridden for eight years. He tells him to rise and make his bed and all the residents of the town turn to following Jesus.<sup>2</sup>

John tells us a story about the pool of Bethesda.<sup>3</sup> Among a great multitude of sick, blind, and lame people was a man paralyzed for 38 years. Jesus asked him, “Do you want to be made well?” Why would Jesus ask him that? Who would lay by a healing pool not wanting to be healed? The man replies he has no one to put him in the pool-no one. I wonder what is going on here?

The three synoptic Gospels- Mark, Matthew and Luke all report the story we read today. They indicate Jesus was accused of blasphemy because instead of healing paralysis he says sins are forgiven.<sup>4</sup> He then states the Son of Man, which means human being, has authority to forgive sin. Perhaps these two stories are less about physical ailment and more about psychological, social, spiritual and emotional health and community.

It is interesting that the only other references to paralysis in the Bible are: Elijah asking the people how long will you be paralyzed by indecision? Isaiah telling the people not to tremble and be paralyzed by fear. Habbakuk writing,

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<sup>2</sup> Matthew 4:24, 8:5-13, Acts 8:7, 9:33

<sup>3</sup> John 5:1-9

<sup>4</sup> Lk 5:18, Mt 9:2

“...the Law has become paralyzed and justice never comes about.” Zephaniah admonishing, “Do not let your hands become paralyzed by panic.” And Matthew who tells us Jesus healed a paralyzed hand to prove it is lawful to work -to do good- on the Sabbath.<sup>5</sup> It seems in the Bible paralysis can include loss of feeling- physical, emotional, spiritual, and mental. It can also include fear, panic, indecision, and loss of community, justice and compassion.

Just what were the sins that Jesus said was forgiven? What needed to be acknowledged and released by forgiveness, compassion and love? What was the reason the man at Bethesda had no one for years to help him? What if these people weren't paralyzed by physical trauma and disease? What if they were paralyzed by lack of community, fear, shame, overwhelmed by things that cause depression and anxiety with no friend to reassure them, or even procrastination caused by perfection? What do we do or engage in that prevents us from connection and new life? What are the hard things, things we avoid, things that keep us paralyzed?

I have a friend who thinks a boring day is getting only one project completed. I am not talking about doing the dishes from breakfast. Things like measuring, buying, transporting, cutting and installing drywall in the basement to create a utility room that encloses the washer and dryer- all in one day! I think that is amazing. But she bewails that whole the project is not completed because she

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<sup>5</sup>1 Kings 18:21, Is 44:8, Hab 1:4, Zep 3:16, Matt 12:10

can't paint it until the walls are dry and tile the floor until it is painted. These are things she will do the next day. (And things I would count as at least two other separate projects requiring days and weeks.) She is the ultimate energizer bunny. She makes me tired and my muscles sore just listening to her plan! It can overwhelm and paralyze me- comparing myself to her. I think, "I couldn't do that," and "I couldn't do it well." I think so long I do not start- those projects or any other. I can be very creative finding ways to be paralyzed. Here is a poem about it.

What paralyzes me is perfection;  
Procrastination,  
Depression,  
Sadness,  
The sin of separation.  
Not just what I have done wrong but failure to change the world's wrongs.  
Overwhelmed  
I fall into  
Despair.  
Lost in lists of things to do;  
Garage too full,  
Bags and boxes needing to be gone through.  
I can forget to lift my eyes to the skies  
Where the trees caress the clouds  
And the blue is so profound it is only broken  
by glorious Light  
that heats and strengthens and grows  
the small shoot within  
that tender seed that has pushed itself  
open to absorb the possibilities of nourishment.  
In the darkness it grows,  
tentatively,  
yet purposefully  
reaching out again.

The paralytic. That's all the identification we have. No name and nothing about the person; just a body that cannot stand or carry a mat. Over centuries it is the only identity. One of the reasons people are not given names is so that we can see could insert our name in the story. What do you need healing from? Does it include any form of paralysis? Remember: the soul can grow from everything it encounters if it can be brought to the Light.

The paralytic had four companions with him; family members, friends. And in the end the paralytic stood up and immediately took their mat and went out before all of them. A rich person needs very little; companions who support and care, a mat to lay on, and new life with tasks given by the Master. Abundant healing indeed.