

Mark 2:1-5

Common English Bible

After a few days, Jesus went back to Capernaum, and people heard that he was at home. So many gathered that there was no longer space, not even near the door. Jesus was speaking the word to them. Some people arrived, and four of them were bringing to him a man who was paralyzed. They couldn't carry him through the crowd, so they tore off part of the roof above where Jesus was. When they had made an opening, they lowered the mat on which the paralyzed man was lying. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Child, your sins are forgiven!"

I love this story so much. It is a story for me of people who will do whatever it takes to get someone help, even if it means tearing off the roof of someone's house to get help. The house where Jesus is speaking is so crowded with people that folks are spilling out on the street, and they can't get in through the door. They are persistent and undeterred, so they climb on top of the house, remove the roof, dig through the adobe, and lower down their friend into the room where Jesus is. Hopefully that roof was not too difficult to repair!

For the next few weeks, we are talking about things that you don't normally hear about in church. There are certain things that we think aren't okay to mention in church. Struggles that we are having or struggles people that we know are having. There are things we need help with and we want to know what to do. We wonder if the church has anything to say, and we don't know because we don't usually talk about these things in church. We wonder can I say this in church when we have questions about addiction, mental health, racism, sexuality or loneliness. Jesus didn't avoid big questions about important topics of his day. Here at Greenland Hills we want you to know that this is a safe place where you can bring all of your cares and concerns to God.

Mental health is something that affects all of us. One in five Americans have a mental illness, and many are reluctant to seek help or do not know where to turn for care.¹ The symptoms of mental illness can be difficult to detect, even when friends and family can tell that something is wrong, they may not know how to intervene or how to direct the person to proper treatment.² That means that it is common for someone in need of mental health services to not get them until it is too late. We don't know the signs and symptoms of mental illness, so we can't adequately help. We may try to get help, but we live in Texas which ranks last in per capita spending on mental health services.³

When treatment is delayed and when there is stigma and discrimination, there is a huge loss of unfulfilled potential in human lives.⁴ Today is Baptism of the Lord Sunday, usually celebrated on the second Sunday in January. We remember Jesus' baptism when John the Baptist baptized Jesus, the heavens were opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved, with you I am well pleased."

I love the story of my baptism. When I was born my grandmother was really struggling with her health. She had diabetes and heart failure but she said she was determined to live to see if she had a new granddaughter or a new grandson. Very soon after I was born my dad would take me to the hospital room doorway when my grandmother was in the hospital. I can't even imagine how hard it must have been for my mom to have a 4 year old daughter, my sister, and a newborn, while her mom was dying. My grandmother passed away when I was five months old

¹ <https://www.mhadallas.org/policy-advocacy/become-advocate/>

² <https://www.mhadallas.org/policy-and-legislation/programs-events-overview/mental-health-training-support/>

³ <https://www.mhadallas.org/policy-advocacy/become-advocate/>

⁴ <https://www.mhadallas.org/policy-advocacy/become-advocate/>

and the family traveled from Houston, Texas to Smithton, Pennsylvania so that she could be buried with the rest of her family in her hometown. My grandmother was laid to rest on Holy Saturday and I was baptized on Easter Sunday in the church that had been the home for my mom and her family for many years.

Thinking about my baptism makes me feel loved because I was surrounded by my family in a place that was so special. We were all surrounded by God's love as we grieved and felt God filling our hearts with comfort and peace. And in my baptism my family was proclaiming that they would teach me about Jesus. In my baptism I became a part of something larger than myself. I became a part of the Christian Church, the body of Christ, where I have found support, love, family, community and faith. Throughout my life when there has been tragedy, my church family has always been there. Church is where I have always felt love and comfort. I feel loved in this place.

At baptism we believe that God is baptizing us. The heavens are opening up, the Holy Spirit is coming like a dove, and we are hearing a voice from heaven saying, you are my child, the beloved; with you I am well pleased. We don't do anything to earn that love. In Baptism God proclaims God's great love for us; we are called, named, and claimed as God's beloved children; we are given the gift of the Holy Spirit;...and then, because of God's love for us, God also promises to forgive, renew, and restore us at all times.⁵ In baptism we experience love, identity, affirmation, commitment, and promise.

We get to be baptized and named as God's beloved child just like Jesus is. You are my child, the beloved; with *you* I am well pleased. We are loved, affirmed and given identity as God's precious child. You are not a mistake and guilt and shame is not from God. God created you and you are a beautiful child of God.

We heard the story from Mark's Gospel of Jesus healing the paralyzed man. It is a story of Jesus saying that wholeness, acceptance, sustenance, and healing are more important to God than anything else. Whatever it takes to receive healing, it is worth it. Recruit everyone that you can to receive healing. Last week in SPA Sunday School, Lea Anne Hicks said some wise words as we talked about addiction. She said, "There are things in life that you can't love or pray away." As we think about mental health, mental illness is treatable and recovery is possible, especially when there is early and effective professional intervention.⁶

We don't know whose idea it was to go visit Jesus, whether it was the man who was paralyzed or the four friends. If it was the idea of the man who was paralyzed, it is a reminder for us that we all have to care for our own mental health. Sometimes you can be so caught up in your stress, that you don't realize the physical discomfort you're experiencing. Headaches, back and shoulder pain, tense muscles, they are all connected to your emotional state.

Have you ever heard of a full body meditation scan? It involves paying attention to parts of the body and bodily sensations in a gradual sequence from feet to head. You want to get comfortable, lying down is preferable. Take a few deep breaths and bring awareness to your feet. If you notice pain, acknowledge it and any thoughts or emotions that accompany it, and gently breathe through it. Breathe into the tension, and if you notice any uncomfortable sensations focus your attention on them. Visualize the tension leaving your body through your breath and evaporating into the air. Move on when you feel ready. Continue with each area of your body, from your feet moving until you reach the top of your head. Notice how you feel and where you're holding your stress. Breathe into any tightness, pain or pressure you are feeling. You want

⁵ <http://www.davidlose.net/2019/01/the-baptism-of-our-lord-c-forgiveness-and-so-much-more/>

⁶ <https://www.mhadallas.org/policy-advocacy/become-advocate/>

to practice this body scan meditation anytime you feel stress or several times throughout the day as a regular practice.

It is our Christian responsibility to care for the mental health of everyone, and that includes ourselves. When this group of people bring the paralyzed man to Jesus, Jesus is impressed with the faith of these four friends. Jesus heals the paralyzed man, not because of anything obvious about the man himself. Jesus is impressed with the belief and effort and ultimate commitment of the friends who carried and brought the man to him. Jesus healed the man when he saw the faith of the four friends.

Just like that group of friends we have a responsibility to care for the mental health of those in our community. We belong to Christ by belonging to each other. We have no choice in the matter. Some people you may like, others you may not, but they belong to us and we belong to them. We need others to pray for us when we cannot find the words or will to pray for ourselves. God hears the faith of our friends who lift up prayers on our behalf. Thanks be to God, Amen.