



Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

Isaiah 43:18-25 2 Corinthians 1:18-22 Mark 2:1-12

See, I am doing something new!

It is becoming visible. Don't you see it?

This is the message from Isaiah about the new age to which Mark answers, "Yes," and tells the story of the paralysed man. This is not a simple healing story, although that is its base. A controversy narrative has been woven into the older story. The setting is interesting. We are told that Jesus was at home. Some translations use "in the house" but, "at home" carries a more personal feel.

"At home" connotes more than a location, it describes a feeling of comfort and strength. It suggests a groundedness. It wasn't long before a crowd gathered so that even the doorway was blocked. With the crowd pressing around, Jesus began to speak.

One group, with a paralysed friend, could find no access to Jesus. Not to be thwarted in their aim of bringing their friend to Jesus, they "unroofed" the roof. This suggests that they had to move thatch and mud to make a sizable hole. We can imagine the crowd's reaction as they became aware of the activity overhead and then the astonishment as a man was lowered into their midst.

When Mark uses an expression like, "seeing their faith", he means more than confidence in God, or even confidence in Jesus' proclamation; it is an attitude expressed in conduct. It involves actions that transcend human obstacles, and cross social boundaries, like the bold action of the unclean woman.

Jesus responds by telling the man that God has forgiven his sins. This is a statement of reassurance. Just as the cure of the leper seemed to come dangerously close to an action reserved to God, so to mention the forgiveness of sin was calculated to raise the hackles of the authorities.

"He blasphemes". This was the most serious charge that could be levelled as it carried the death penalty. Jesus sees the play of expressions on the faces of the scribes. He poses a rhetorical question. Which is easier, to cure, or to forgive sins?

Here the "easier" means in terms of being able to verify the result.

It's harder to heal because everyone can see for themselves whether or not the action is successful. So Jesus uses the "harder" action to prove he can do the "easier" action.

What is Mark saying to his community and us in this story?
He is telling us that controversy dogged Jesus' steps from the beginning and also that healing is not just a physical thing.

Jesus is concerned about wholeness. Our spirits are often more in need of healing than our bodies. Jesus attends first to the man's spiritual condition and then to his physical needs. He was aware that spiritual paralysis can prevent people from living a full and happy life. This also defines his ministry as fellowship with "sinners" or the spiritually poor. The healing of the whole person points to the action of God in our midst.

An important verse in this story is the use of the title, Son of Man. This is a title that appeals to the Markan community. Jesus healed the sick and forgave sin as "Son of Man". The title is ambiguous. When Jesus is told that only God can forgive sins he replies that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive. This is an echo of "on earth as it is in heaven", God's will is active in the world.

Through our shared life in the body of Christ, the healing and forgiving ministries will continue. We have God's word on it.

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